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THE

KNIGHTS OF THE LION

A Romance of the Thirteenth Century

WITH A PREFACE
BY THE
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PREFACE

THIS remarkable story has been rescued from the obscurity of a lofty shelf in an old library. The date as well as the style in which the romance is written show it to have been penned at a time when some of the greatest masters of our literature were bewitching the world with fiction destined to take its place among our standard works. If 'sensational' tales be now popular, they owe their vogue to a rapid and startling succession of incidents recalling experiences of the social life of to-day. More dramatic are the possibilities of those distant times, when the nations of Europe had not become united in vast political organisations, and when races rather than nations, and districts rather than countries, were arrayed in constant contention one against the other. Even where, as in the German Empire, a vast portion of civilised Europe had obeyed one sceptre, the method of electing an Emperor gave ample scope for the rivalries of contending nobles and ambitious cities to find vent in warfare, which often assumed a form rather predatory than patriotic. Diverting the thoughts of men from more selfish ends and from mischievous desires, came the great evangel of warlike heroism which urged the strife against the Infidel until should be accomplished the restitution to Christian worship of the Holy Land.

There is a great charm in looking back on those days, and the fascination is probably all the greater because we are so

far from them. The story contained in the following pages leads us back to the era when picturesque castles still looked over the great oak woods of mediæval Germany; when knights were formed into orders and confederacies, each with its own romantic badge and watchword; when ladies wove the banners under which mustered the armoured troop quitting the fortalice on errands from whose bourne too often very few returned; when the Church, swayed by ambitious and worldly Pontiffs, yet held a position of unimpaired authority, whose fiats none ventured to question; and when sins were forgiven and the blessing of religion obtained by those who, forsaking for a time private feuds and international war, assumed the Crusader's shirt of mail, and bled for their faith in Palestine.

It is to the 'Borderland of old Romance,'

> Where glitter hauberk, helm, and lance,
> And banner waves, and trumpet sounds,
> And ladies ride with hawk on wrist,
> And mighty warriors sweep along,
> Magnified by the purple mist,
> The dusk of centuries and of song,

to which this tale leads us. Although the style is often old-fashioned, I have hardly altered a line, for the constant succession of incident makes the reader forget the mannerism in the interest of the tale.

The office of fiction is not only to portray the working of the feelings that animate and influence the human mind; not only to dissect the inner springs of action, or even to paint accurately the effects of passion, sorrow, or excitement; but also to put before our eyes the most pleasing pictures, whether of men and women or of natural scenery. Connected, perhaps, with the studies from human life, but still apart from them, it is one of the greatest privileges of the novel to place before us scenes which it needs no studious analysis to

enjoy. With such a guide we can, without the annoyances of travel, experience much of its delight. The forest glades, the guarded tower, the monastery's shrine, the bright shores of the Mediterranean, the coasts of Syria, and the walls of the sacred city of Jerusalem are some of the pictures offered to our eyes in this volume. But the aspects of misery, the weird phantoms of superstition, and the sad moments of fatal horror are also forcibly presented to us. Combat, imprisonment, and the quick transition of events hurry on the reader, who has scarce time to realise one situation before another has been created, with an invention which is tireless.

I believe the book to have been written by one of the best known and best appreciated novelists of his day, but having no absolute proof to give, I withhold the name, and only hope that some of the pleasure with which I read the dusty MS. may be felt by those who read, with far more ease, the present type.

It may be as well to mention from German history the historic base on which this story is founded.

The time offers one remarkable and picturesque effect which has fixed itself in men's memory more than the battles and the changes in the sovereignty of State. This was the wonderful spectacle of the Children's Crusade. Thousands of children followed a boy who, first in Saxony, went through town and village singing that Christ had laid upon him the duty of giving back to Him His Cross, which lay in the Holy Land. Almost all the boys who heard this little Saxon enthusiast joined him, and nothing could stop the little pilgrims, who after a time streamed to the Alps, and were scattered in attempting their passage.

But events less striking to the imagination claim our attention in connection with the following story.

In regard to the death of the Emperor Philip, it was always

said that he had been murdered by the Count of the Palatinate, Otto of Wittelsbach. This savage had made himself so agreeable to Philip, that he had made a half promise to him to give to him his daughter, but the young lady disliked Otto and would have none of him. Her father, seeing that he could not prevail against her dislike of the suitor, cast him off also, and hence the act of revenge of the rejected lover. Philip was the son of the famous Barbarossa, the monarch who in popular legend is said to be still asleep in the cavern of a mountain, waiting the time when he shall reappear and again reign as German Emperor. His red beard has, they say, grown through the table at which he is sitting, but the time will come when again in all his glory he shall reign as of old. After Philip's untimely death, a meeting of the princes was held at Frankfort and another Otto, a Duke of Brunswick, was elected as Otto IV. This was in 1208. The new Kaiser made a splendid progress to Rome, but fell out with His Holiness the Pope, and had thereafter many a trouble in consequence. The French were put against him, and he had a bloody battle with them ending in his defeat. The papal ban had not only been sufficient to drive a foreign foe upon him, but had undermined the fidelity of his own Germans, who, under the guidance of the Duke of Brabant, attached themselves in 1215 to the young king Frederick, as told in the story, and who was crowned Emperor at Aix-la-Chapelle by the Papal legate. Six years afterwards Otto, who had lived neglected and unhappy in Brunswick, died.

Frederick, called the second of that name, was the son of Henry VI. and Constantia. It was from his mother that he had derived the possession of the Kingdoms of Naples, Sicily, and Sardinia. At Rome, in 1219, in his twenty-fifth year, he was solemnly crowned Roman Emperor by Honorius III. He had to fight powerful nobles in Apulia and Tuscany before

he could consider himself undisputed master of his dominions in Italy, and believing that the Pope had encouraged his southern enemies, he gathered the German electors together at Frankfort, complained to them of Honorius' action, and had his little son, a boy of nine years of age, crowned as Roman Emperor and declared heir to his throne. This child was his son by another Constantia, the daughter of Ferdinand of Spain, mentioned in this story as his betrothed. A Papal ban against him followed. Then came Frederick's bold defiance of the Pope, and his reconciliation with the Church, after Rome had been menaced by an army. Constantia was dead, and Frederick married, in Italy, Iolantha, the daughter of the titular King of Jerusalem. We need not follow his further fortunes and adventures in detail; suffice it to say that he became the actual possessor of Jerusalem, through a treaty with the Turks, and that he, by a third marriage, became the husband of an English Princess, namely, of Isabella, the sister of the King of England. He died in the year 1250, after a life of stirring events, and boasting of few peaceful years. His warfare with the Popes was constant, for hardly had Honorius died than his successor became embroiled in quarrels with Frederick. Iolantha's son, Conrad, became Emperor after the death of his father.

These times gave ample scope for rapid change of fortune in romantic story, and they have been cleverly used in the novel now published.

LORNE.

THE

KNIGHTS OF THE LION

CHAPTER I.

THE death of Henry the Cruel occasioned the utmost confusion throughout the German Empire, and seemed to serve as a signal for the petty princes and nobles to throw off the yoke under which they had hitherto reluctantly bowed, and to leave their wretched country a prey to all the horrors of civil war.

Frederick, Count of Frohburg, was almost the only noble who in those days of trouble retired within the ancient castle of his family, and spent his days in peace and solitude, taking no share in the feuds and quarrels that raged among his neighbours.

He had given his vote at the late Imperial election in favour of Berthold, Duke of Zähringen, but, contented in having thus done what he conceived to be his duty, although his wishes had failed, he left the issue to the Almighty, vowing obedience and fealty to whomsoever His all-powerful arm might place on the Imperial throne.

The extent of his feudal possessions, the respect paid to the antiquity of his family, and the power inseparable from his immense riches, had till now protected his domains, which comprised the whole valley of Iffen, in Switzerland, from attack.

Under the protection of his arm his subjects enjoyed all

the blessings of peace. In tranquillity they cultivated their lands, and unmolested they enjoyed the fruits of their own labour. One morning, while he was still reposing on his couch, his eldest son Frederick burst into his apartment, and with haggard looks announced that the Castle of Hagberg, the seat of his bosom friend, had been for some hours a prey to the flames. The assurance which the father gave of sending immediate assistance to extinguish the flames, and of inviting his friend to partake of the accommodation of his own Castle, till the effects of the unfortunate accident could be repaired, seemed only to heighten the grief of young Frederick.

'I, too, alas!' exclaimed he, 'had attributed it solely to accident, and had sent all my followers to assist in extinguishing the flames. They are this moment returned. Ludman von Rothberg had attacked our unsuspecting friend in the dead hour of night, and, after stabbing him at the door of his own apartment, loading his wife and children with fetters, and carrying off everything which they could bear along with them, had set fire to his Castle in several places.

'When my followers reached the place, these monsters were yet engaged in dividing their prey, and, pointing their blood-stained hands in scorn, laughed at their provident care. Too few in number to revenge the foul deed or attack the miscreants, they were hastening back, when the wretched Hagberg's widow, springing from the grasp of the murderers who held her, called to them to stop, and clashing in indignation the fetters that bound her, while her hair streamed wild and dishevelled over her shoulders, "Relate to your lord," she cried, "what you have seen, and if he does not avenge this foul murder, to the throne of Almighty God will the curses of a wretched widow and her orphans rise against him, and——" but the rest was lost in the shouts of the bloody crew. Ludman, flinging down his gauntlet on which the blood of Hagberg was yet reeking, shouted: "There is a challenge for your old dotard and his boys, and if they do not choose to accept of it, may the dogs dishonour his shield, and the mice burrow in the sheath of his sword!"'

While the young man was giving this narrative, old

Frohburg's eyes darted sparks of indignation, and he frequently attempted to interrupt him; but when he came to this part of his story, springing from his couch, he swore a dreadful oath] that this jest should be wept for in tears of blood, and never should his aged limbs press that place of rest till 'Hagberg's death had been nobly avenged.

Frederick then proceeded: 'The villain further said, "the eldest son of yon old driveller was, we understand, Hagberg's darling friend; then take to him this memento," and flung his mangled corpse amongst our men. "Bury him if ye will, and, while you deck the fool's grave with flowers, go and blubber out your sorrows like a parcel of bedridden beldames!" Father, this was too much; and yet I can hardly help playing the woman when I think of his wretched widow and helpless orphans. But no tear shall quench the thirst of vengeance which fires my soul! Haste then, sir, to rouse your followers; let every man be marshalled to the field, for the wretch must have been conscious of some mighty support ere he dared to have bearded you to the face. Among his followers our men could distinguish the banners of Friedau, Dornegg, Mönchstein, and Riemberg, and guessed they numbered at least five hundred.'

'Then draw your sword,' cried the old man, 'and let the alarm bell speak to the whole valley, for this day's sun, ere he sinks, shall see my vassals hastening to revenge this foul and bloody murder.'

The young man flew to obey old Frohburg's orders. In a few moments the notes of the alarm bell were flung along the valley, and answered by the shrill notes of the trumpet, and in the close of the day the whole of the vassals were assembled under the walls of the Castle. At the head of the chief of his feudal vassals, the old Count entered the banqueting hall, where on the daïs or platform at the upper end, elevated above the floor of the main portion of the stately space, lay the bloody corpse of Hagberg, surrounded by numerous lights. He pointed to the ghastly object, and then turning to his followers, he said: 'Friends, the first duty I require of you is to commit to the earth all that remains of the once noble

Hagberg, and next to revenge his execrable murder.' He then placed himself at the head of the mournful procession which moved on in deathlike silence, save for the clanking on the marble pavement made by the swords of the warriors as they descended the massive steps leading to the chapel, and as they lowered the body into the vault, the tears rolled down the furrowed cheek of many a warrior. 'Let thy spirit rest in peace,' said the Count, 'for thine avengers stand around thee, and here, while I kneel by thy grave, in the Temple of the Most High Who knoweth our inmost thoughts, I swear to protect thy wife and children, and that same Power can be my witness that I have never voluntarily slighted the blessings of peace, or, uncalled for, sought the horrors of war—nay, even now would I rather leave to the injured laws of my country to redress this foul deed. Far rather would I lead thy widow and orphans to the foot of the throne and there demand justice. But, alas! my wretched country has now no father to protect her children, and while this innocent blood calls out to Heaven for vengeance, it is our duty to show ourselves the delegates of Heaven, and wash out the guilt of the murderer in his own blood. Leave me now, my friends. Anon we shall meet in the court.'

The great court of the Castle was lit up by numerous torches, whose dim and smoky glare chequered the silvery light of the moon, which, pouring through the loopholes and embrasures, fell on the heraldic shields sculptured on the wall and on the trophies of weapons of war.

In the front stood the knights clad in complete armour surmounted with crests and waving plumes, and behind them thronged their various serfs, squires and grooms in corslets, brigantines and gorgets, each anxiously expecting the order for the field, when the old Count clad in his shirt of mail approached, leading by the hand his only daughter, the lovely Adelaide.

She was then in all the pride of youth and beauty, having barely completed her seventeenth year, and though many a knight had owned the power of her charms, and sighed in secret, her extreme youth had hitherto prevented any open declaration of passion. 'Love,' said the hoary veteran, 'is ever

a concomitant of true courage, and beauty its best reward. This maid then, my noble friends, and half my wealth shall be the glorious prize of him whose courage shall this day prove he best deserves her.' A universal shout of joy was the only answer; and, shaking their brands upon the hollow of their shields, each seized his steed, and filing along the drawbridge had already reached the valley, ere the loud voice of the Count could call a halt.

Here, directed by prudence, he separated the veteran and more infirm warriors from the younger part of his followers, to the former committing the ward of the fortress during his absence; but for the first time his commands were listened to with displeasure, as each panted for a share of the just combat, and longed to distinguish himself under the eyes of his noble leader. But, conscious of the necessity of the measure, they at length yielded a lingering consent, recommending to their sons not to forfeit the honour of their name, and reminding them of the glorious prize which was to crown their valour, and over whose safety they were now to watch during their absence.

The Count and his little band of heroes now moved on, and about midnight reached the neighbourhood of Rothberg. To its walls they were soon led by the wild sounds of licentious mirth which descended to the valley. In silent indignation the troop advanced, and wine and a blind confidence having stupefied the ruffians to all fear of surprise, they found the drawbridge lowered, and had actually penetrated to the innermost court ere the sentinels had given the alarm. But an instant thereafter the battle raged on every side, and although many of the guards of the Castle had fallen under the swords of their assailants ere they could fly to their arms, yet their number seemed to increase every minute, and, urged by despair and the fumes of the wine they had swallowed, they disputed every inch of ground.

Victory at length declared in favour of the cause of virtue, and the few who escaped the swords of the assailants were precipitated from the battlements or perished in their attempt to cross the moat.

The widow and orphans of the unfortunate Hagberg were borne in triumph from their dungeon, and in the morning the little troop, crowned with glory, and bending under the spoils of the vanquished, entered the Castle of Frohburg.

Each warrior received his son with transports of joy, while each with trembling expectation demanded to whom was destined the hand of the fair Adelaide; but a universal silence was the only answer, as the old Count had not yet mentioned the subject, or demanded who were the candidates for the distinguished honour.

Upon entering the great hall the Count commanded silence, and, bowing to his followers who stood around him in anxious expectation, began as follows: 'To him whose courage on this night has proved he best deserves her I promised my Adelaide, nor will I retract a promise that I voluntarily made. Approach, then, my brave companions-in-arms, and let each boldly speak his claims; but that I may not be accused of partiality, as I might be were I to decide in my own cause, you shall yourselves from the vanquished who remained behind nominate the arbiters of your respective claims. But one thing more: as I and my brave boys have shared with you the horrors of this night, so too is it but fair that we should also share the prize, and should the decree of the judges, whom you yourselves shall select, to us adjudge the prize, then shall the fair Adelaide remain free in her choice.'

Loud murmurs of disapprobation here interrupted the Count, but again enjoining silence he continued: 'Judge not of me too rashly, my friends, nor condemn me unheard, for know that, in the midst of last night's battle, my conscience for the first time overwhelmed me with the memory of a former vow, made to our Heavenly Father, and that long ere this, in reward of my daughter's filial virtues and obedience, I solemnly vowed to Heaven never to attempt to thwart or direct her in the choice of a husband, but to leave her uncontrolled in her wishes to choose one worthy of herself from among the sons of my neighbours. In my zeal to avenge Hagberg's death, my rash vow escaped my memory, but, when it flashed across my mind, the hopes of regaining for my

Adelaide the freedom of her choice doubly urged my sword and that of my sons; and should now the palm of honour be awarded to them or me, 'tis you, my friends, shall be the gainers, for then my Adelaide shall be herself the umpire, and he whom she may think most deserving will, with her hand, receive her heart. Are you satisfied? Have I the happiness of meeting your approval? Is this justice? Speak my friends!'

'Yes!' cried they all unanimously, 'and even should the palm of glory not be awarded to you, as it certainly ought to be, yet still shall Adelaide remain unbiassed in her choice. Love alone shall light the marriage torch, and the hand of beauty itself without the heart were nothing. She alone can bestow that, and she alone shall be our judge.' The happy father now selected from the most venerable of his followers the judges who were to decide upon the claims of him and his sons, and binding them by the most solemn oath to the strictest impartiality he stepped forward, and bowing, spoke to them: 'In last night's combat I was the first to stem the torrent that poured from the hall of the Castle, until, seeing the murderer of my friend, I darted towards him, striking up a hundred swords that in vain attempted to arrest my progress, and dashing them aside I reached the villain's heart. See how his coward blood still stains my good blade, and, reeking as it is, it shall be laid upon my Hagberg's grave that it may soothe his troubled spirit.' The judges made answer, through the mouth of the foremost of their number: 'In a few words you have spoken volumes. Who will venture to oppose your claims?' But the Count's younger son, Henry, exclaimed immediately: 'That will I! Father, you have already gathered laurels enough in the rough field of war, nor must you grudge me these. True it is, you were the foremost in the onset. True it is that it was you who pierced the dreadful Rothberg's heart, but had no sword guarded your head the while, where had been the victory? To you, my judges, I appeal. My father has claimed no more than is his due, but while his hand was upraised to strike the foeman dead with his good sword, I felled to the ground five arms uplifted against his

precious life, and after Rothberg's fall, covering him with this shield, I bore him through a grove of pikes, nor did my strength fail me until I had placed him safe among his friends. Thus will I also lay this shield on Hagberg's grave, for it was the protector of his avenger.'

The judges turned to the Count and again addressed him: 'Noble warrior, your claim must sink before your son's, for without his aid and strength we had ere now been weeping over your stricken corpse. Your son has this night shown the dawning of a glorious day. You have fought nobly. His deeds were glorious. To those achievements must your own claims now yield.'

The Count, his feelings overcome by his pride in his son, could only answer: 'With joy and exultation I bow to your decree. Well then, my Frederick, will you enter the lists with your brother?' 'I will,' said Frederick, 'for, if I mistake not, the reward awaited alike the most noble as the most valiant deed. In the onset I trust my sword was not the backwardest, but when I saw my noble brother's arm stretched to protect your venerable head, and beheld him bear you uninjured to your friends, I hastened to protect and restore to freedom the widow and orphans of my murdered friend, followed by a few of my trusty comrades. My stroke had already felled to the ground their savage gaoler, from whom I snatched his keys, when the voice of the execrable Friedau was heard, urging his savages to massacre "the mother and the brats." I placed my body as a shield to bar their entrance, and though ten to one we conquered.

'See here and here,' he cried, and bared his breast, 'these were from Friedau's sword, but he paid for them with his heart's best blood.

'On entering this horrid dungeon, I found the widow of my friend fainting and stretched upon the moist earth, while her helpless babes clung weeping around her. As I knelt beside her I vowed to God that I would be her protector, and a father to her helpless orphans, and that if she would ever deign to listen to my suit, I would claim a lawful title to that sacred charge.'

The unanimous voice of the umpires now adjudged the

palm of victory to Frederick, and Adelaide's choice being thus rendered free, she was summoned to the hall, and told that she must now decide which knight had proved himself most deserving of the honour of her fair hand. With downcast eyes, but yet with a look in which a secret joy seemed to reign, she moved forward to the seat appointed for her, while the eyes of the whole assembly followed her and each warrior breathed a silent but fervent vow that he might be the blessed object of her choice.

Rising gently from her seat, she waved her hand, and instantly a universal silence prevailed in the circle of knights, who hardly dared to breathe, lest any sound which might fall from the lovely lips of the maiden should be lost.

'Noble knights and friends,' she said, 'that you should have thought my hand a reward sufficient to stimulate your valour or crown its success, accept a maid's most fervent thanks, and I here vow to make every return in my poor ability for your generosity in leaving my choice thus unbiassed. My heart is still free, and therefore my sentence, whatever it may be, shall be impartial; but you must remember that it is to a maiden that you have devolved the choice. What you deem brave may to such a one seem cruel. The shout of victory is to a woman oft the thrill of agony; and the tear of misery often embitters the cup of welcome which she is obliged to present to her guests. With such a heart and such feelings must I therefore judge.'

A shout of approbation, accompanied by the clashing of their shields, confessed the pleasure with which this speech was received by the whole assembly, who, eager to obtain the beauteous prize, began in order the narration of the deeds on which they founded their claims. These accounts were in general nearly uniform, and differed but in trifling circumstances. The meed of praise could be denied to none, and in most the veracity of their tale was attested by yet bleeding witnesses.

Each had now spoken their claim, save only one, and, though their story had often beguiled the gentle Adelaide of her tears, her choice wavered, and her heart remained free.

He who had yet to speak was the young Count of Thierstein, left almost in infancy to the protection of the old Count Frohburg. His father had fallen on the far-away plains of Palestine, whither he had sailed to raise the Cross. He had been educated along with his own sons, and shared with the lovely Adelaide in her infant sports. As he advanced towards manhood the difference of their pursuits had of course separated them, but the impression made by her youthful charms had, even at that early period, secured his heart from the fascination of all other women. Trembling between hopes and fears, he had always modestly shrunk back, and yielded the precedence to the other knights. But the time was now come when he could no longer delay, but must also state his claims before his lovely judge. A deep crimson suffused the cheeks of Adelaide when in this last candidate she recognised the companion of her childhood, on whom, though unconsciously, her thoughts had often dwelt, and feelings hitherto unknown now assailed her heart.

CHAPTER II.

As the knight advanced, he held his cloak closely pressed about him, while beneath it he seemed to hold something concealed.

Bowing gracefully to the audience, but with a voice faltering between love and fear, he thus began: 'Could the glorious prize for which we strive have added strength as well as courage, this single arm had borne alone the weight of last night's bloody fray; but at least, Count Henry, to you I appeal, if I was not ever to be found where the battle raged the hottest. Did I ever quit your side in the harvest of death? Did not my sword guard your head when you left it unprotected to save that of your noble sire?'

'With gratitude I acknowledge it,' said Henry 'and own that, when a shower of weapons were poured against me, I beheld your friendly blade stretched to ward the blows from my defenceless head.'

Count Thierstein added: 'My simple tale is ended, for what little else fell to my share to act in that busy night can be of interest to no one here.'

'But,' said Adelaide, softly—'but perhaps I may wish to hear it.'

Count Thierstein, thus encouraged, continued: 'To your commands I bow. After the fall of the ruffians, while our troops were scouring the Castle in search of plunder, the voice of a woman in distress reached my ear. I hastened to the apartment from whence the sounds proceeded, and pu[illegible] open the door I entered just as a savage had stretched [illegible] of Rothberg's wife lifeless at his feet, while another grasp held an infant, ready to dash its brains u[illegible]

ment. I snatched the trembling victim from his hold and bore it off—my only trophy.—Behold it now,' he said, unloosing at the same moment his cloak, 'behold it nestled in my arms, smiling, unconscious of its cruel fate. Ever carefully concealing it from its father's enemies, I will myself be to it a parent. Your goodness, my lord,' and he turned to the old Count, 'in snatching me from want, has placed me in opulence, and towards this little innocent will I endeavour to pay the debt of gratitude I owe to you.'

He ceased, and a murmur of surprise ran through the hall, and every knight in trembling expectation turned his eyes towards Adelaide, who had covered her face with her hands to hide those tears that flowed unbidden. At length, dashing them aside, she eagerly exclaimed: 'Give me the child: I, too, will be a mother to it.' Thierstein placed it gently in her arms, and, while she covered it with kisses, looked up timidly to her father, who stood enraptured over her.

Then asked Count Frohburg, 'Daughter, am I now to decide?'

'No,' she answered—'no, father, I will. But first one question more: Count Thierstein, do you know the names of the wretches who would have murdered this innocent, after having butchered its unfortunate mother?'

Count Thierstein replied: 'That is the only request, madam, that you can ever make, and I refuse; but, as I doubt not that ere now they have repented the rash act into which they were hurried, I must retain their names a secret, and leave their punishment to the goadings of their own conscience.'

Adelaide said then, with dignity: 'The contest then is past. I have probed you to the quick, and found you alike brave and generous and noble. Take this then,' and she gave him her hand, 'in reward of the treasure which you have bestowed on me. We may now alike fulfil our vows, and prove ourselves indeed the parents of this little innocent.'

Unable to reply, Thierstein bowed, impressing a thousand on her proffered hand, while Adelaide, bending forward, her virgin blushes. No one ventured to break the ce that prevailed, and although in the eyes of

some of the knights the fire of envy and rage might be seen to glow, yet the generality rejoiced in Thierstein's happiness. The old Count at length interrupted the distressing silence by advancing towards the lovers, and breathing over them a fervent blessing.

'Well hast thou deserved my daughter,' said he to Thierstein, 'nor will I forget the promised dowry. The forfeited estates of your father shall be instantly redeemed, the hospitable fires of your ancestors once more lit up, and I shall think myself more than repaid in seeing my family renewed in you and my Adelaide.'

Frederick and Henry now embraced their sister and her chosen husband; congratulations were poured in on all sides on the happy pair, and retiring to the banqueting hall the others endeavoured to drown their disappointment in the juice of the grape. Adelaide and Thierstein were placed by each other, and in stolen glances and sighs endeavoured to express their feelings, which the presence of so many witnesses prevented their uttering, till the father, taking compassion on the embarrassment of their situation, permitted them to rise before the rest, advising them to profit by the serenity of the evening, and take a ramble through the forest.

I need not mention the joy of the lovers, when thus authorised to speak their feelings, or the delight which both felt on finding that their hearts had long united though in secret, and that each had long wished though they dared not to hope for this consummation of all their joys.

In communications such as these the hours flow by unperceived, till Frederick approached them with a countenance on which was written the deepest sorrow. It was long before the tender inquiries of Adelaide could induce him to speak, but at length he exclaimed:

'Yes, my beloved sister, you shall know everything. Grief is too great to be concealed, too acute not to seek for comfort. You who so well know what it is to love, and now experience all its sweets, can feel for me, and guess my misery!

'Clara von Hagberg—oh, how shall I begin—or where can I end? Surely no one has ever loved as I have, for I loved

her long before she was the wife of Hagberg. She was a virgin scarce fifteen years of age when I first beheld her in Dornegg's Castle. Her large black eyes, while they commanded respect, seemed to seek and to promise a warmer sentiment, and what heart could have refused it? Mine at least paid it with usury. My attentions were not lost upon her, and soon drew from the lovely maid an avowal of reciprocal attachment. Never, my Adelaide, can I forget that blessed moment. Even now, methinks I see her as she stood before me covered with blushes, her beaming eyes bent towards the ground, her whole frame agitated, and her lovely bosom throbbing, till her rosy lips were opened in trembling accents to speak my bliss. I at length tore myself away, happy in the certainty of being beloved, and the conviction that my father would not hesitate to sanction our mutual wishes. But alas! how fallacious were my hopes, and how cruelly were all my visions nipped in the bud! Sister, you may recollect that fatal day when my father and Clara's sire quarrelled about some trespasses of right of forest—my tears and prayers were alike in vain, nor could I bring either my father or Ranstein to yield their claims, and the latter, after having forbidden me evermore to see his daughter, finding that we still continued to meet in secret, banished my Clara to a remote convent whose name or situation I could never learn. Yet did I not despair, though hope was almost dead, but the active life which my pursuits forced me to lead in some degree enabled me to bear my load of woe. But at length even the last glimmering of hope was extinguished in the awful certainty of my misery, and even now when I think of the dreadful day my heart almost misgives me.

'At that period Hagberg purchased the fortress and domains of Thuringen. He had only taken possession of it, with his young Countess, when my restless inquiries led me into that neighbourhood; and, hearing that his wife—who had been educated in some distant convent—lived with her husband in the most perfect retirement, some secret presentiment, as it would seem, made me determined to visit them. As I approached the Castle I saw a female figure in an arbour,

apparently engaged in the perusal of some book of devotion. Her stature, her air, her gait—everything seemed to breathe the image of my long-lost Clara. She turned her face towards me. They were the same eyes, the same mouth—it was herself! I flung myself from my horse, and in a moment was at her feet. The whole world disappeared from before my eyes. "Clara, Clara!" was all I could utter, and her only reply was by repeating my name as she sank into my arms. I pressed her frantically to my breast—when, springing from my embrace, and, speaking in a voice that still vibrates in my ear, "Wretched Frederick, I am Hagberg's wife!" darted from my sight.

'How long I remained there, or how I got home, I know not, for when my recollection first returned I found myself in my bed; you, Adelaide, were seated by my side, and from you I first learned that for upwards of a month my life had been despaired of.'

Adelaide, amid her tears, replied: 'Dear brother, had I known the cause of your illness, my tears had flowed still more abundantly for thee.'

'Three tedious months,' said Frederick, 'elapsed ere I recovered my strength, and then I determined to see Clara once more, before I bade her adieu for ever.

'Hagberg had often visited my father during my illness, and had even been carried by him into my sick-chamber. I shrank from his sight, because he was the husband of my Clara; and yet I was obliged to submit to it, as through his means alone could I hope to see and speak to her, as I wished once more to do. In consequence of repeated solicitations, I visited his abode. He received me with open arms, while Clara stood trembling by his side, her eyes alone—in which a tear trembled—speaking my welcome. She was in deep mourning for her father, and the sable colour of her dress, by rendering her still more interesting, added new beauties to the pale blush of her cheek and the trembling lustre of her eye, as she stood before me with the cup of welcome. My eyes were rivetted on her charms, when, wandering over her angelic form, I for the first time observed that my Clara was

about to be a mother. O sister! O Thierstein!—my feelings at that moment were horrible; and, overcome by the dreadful certainty, I sank lifeless at her feet. It was the voice of Clara that at last recalled me to a hated life. Her unsuspecting husband attributed my sudden indisposition to my late illness, and I took my leave, determined never to see her again. Next day, however, beheld me again seated by her side, although a look of pity was all that I obtained, or dared to hope for.

'Often when her husband has embraced her in my presence and she has cruelly seemed to return it, I have felt the fire flash in my eyes, and I could have murdered them on the spot, till an imploring look from Clara calmed my fury, and seemed to say that she had yielded to a sense of duty and not to love. In this dreadful state of alternate frenzy or calmer misery did five long years drag on.

'What my feelings were yesterday, when the corpse of the murdered Hagberg was laid before me, I will not say, but, while revenge actuated all others, the thoughts of Clara in captivity alone affected me.

'The events of last night are already known to you: you heard me vow to make her mine, and witnessed my father's ready assent; but she—oh, she rejects my suit, and vows to end her days within a cloister.'

'Brother, be comforted,' said Adelaide. 'Clara were unworthy of your love, could she have listened to a declaration so untimely urged. How could you expect that she should already listen to vows of love, and would she not merit your contempt, could she so soon forget her murdered lord? Leave it to time, and rest assured that love and constancy must finally prevail.'

'Wait!' exclaimed Frederick. 'Ah, sister, you little know the agony of hope delayed. Bid the expiring lamp to wait, and that to-morrow you will supply it with oil! Think you the trembling flame will be fed with expectations? No, I have lived long enough on hopes; for years have my miseries endured. This day then must seal my doom, or heaven knows to what my agony may urge me. Adelaide, if you would save

your wretched brother, hasten to her, for the next hour must decide my fate.'

Adelaide now flew to Clara and described to her the situation of her brother with all the eloquence of true feeling, and she who had never felt towards her husband other feelings than those which a sense of duty inspired, now moved by the picture of Frederick's sufferings, promised at the expiry of a twelvemonth to crown his wishes.

I will not attempt to describe the transports of Frederick on receiving this welcome promise. He instantly seized the hand of Adelaide, and would have hurried her to the apartment of Clara, but suddenly stopping and falling on his knees, 'Promise me, beloved Adelaide,' he said, 'to grant me one request, and do it even before you learn its nature.' Adelaide yielded a smiling assent, and he continued: 'Vow, then, that you will not give your hand to Thierstein till the day that Clara consents to crown my wishes, and let the same sun gild both our joys. I shall then be certain of two powerful intercessors, and your impatient lover may perhaps persuade Clara to shorten the period of her mourning.' Adelaide, though perhaps half repenting her promise so rashly given, consented to her brother's wish and persuaded Thierstein to do the same.

I will pass over in silence the scenes of alternate hopes and fears, love and entreaties, which followed. Suffice it to say that the old Count approved of Clara's scruples, and of Adelaide's promise, to which the anxious lovers were obliged to submit. In this way six months rolled on.

It was on the evening of a lovely spring day that Count Frohburg summoned Frederick and Adelaide to his presence. On entering his apartment they found him walking about in violent agitation, while his countenance betrayed symptoms of the most poignant sorrow. At first he did not seem to observe their entrance, but at length turning towards them he said: 'Frederick, my beloved son, and you, my gentle Adelaide, are your affections still the same, and does your happiness still depend as it did on your intended unions with Clara and Thierstein?'

An assurance that their sole hopes of bliss in this world rested on them, accompanied by an involuntary look of surprise, was the answer of both. The father, then drawing a writing from his bosom, said (while the tear started into his eye): 'Heaven knows the pang it gives my heart to be obliged to cloud the happiness of my beloved children, but read, and read *aloud*, Frederick, that my poor Adelaide may also learn the treachery of Clara and of Thierstein.'

Frederick then, in a voice hardly audible, read as follows:

'I vainly sought this whole day for an opportunity of speaking to you in private, but Frederick never quitted my side, and Adelaide was ever hanging on your arm, and as you apparently did not notice the sign which I made to you after supper, I am forced to have recourse to this method of communication. When the watchman, then, announces the eleventh hour, meet me under the large lime tree in the garden. I must add that in my heart you have an advocate but too ready to second your wishes, and your last welcome proposal has silenced all my scruples. Come, then, that we may make our final arrangement. 'CLARA.'

'If this is not my death-blow,' said Frederick, as he concluded, 'then am I immortal!'

Adelaide cried: 'No, no! It is impossible, it cannot be! Some horrid treachery, sure, has been practised on us. No, no! it cannot be true. He loved me so tenderly, with such truth and purity.'

'How came this letter, sir, into your possession?' asked Frederick.

The Count answered: 'Bertram had received it from Clara with strict injunctions to deliver it in private to Thierstein. My faithful old servant, alarmed at her evident confusion and anxious desire of secrecy, suspected that all must not be right, and brought the letter to me.'

But,' said Adelaide, 'are you certain, brother, that the characters are hers?'

'Alas!' said Frederick, 'I fear that there cannot be a doubt of it; too well do I know her hand.'

The agony of all the parties may be easily conceived, and a thousand different resolutions were formed and again abandoned; but it was at last settled that the letter should be given to Thierstein, as originally intended, and the appointment allowed to take place; while in the meantime the old Count, concealed behind the lime tree, might be a witness to their conference. It was in vain that Frederick begged to be permitted to go instead of his father. The old man, with a degree of sternness which he had never before used to his son, ordered him to retire with Adelaide, requesting his word of honour that he would not attempt to follow him, and threatening him with his paternal curse if he dared to disobey. Saying this, the old man retired to execute the plan which had been agreed on.

The watchman had scarce called the hour of eleven, and the different sentinels on the ramparts repeated the sound, when Frohburg, girding on his sword, stole to the garden in silence.

The calmness of the day had been succeeded by the most dreadful night. The heavens were in a blaze, while the wind howled in awful gusts round the battlements, and the rain dashed wildly against the casements. Everything seemed to conduce to the horrors of the night, and to rage in unison with the feelings of the unfortunate Frederick. Regardless of the storm, he tore open the casement, and sat listening in agony. A shriek of anguish reached his ear; he recognised the voice of Clara, and sank senseless on the floor, while Adelaide threw herself on her knees, and breathed a prayer for protection to her Almighty Father.

The door was flung open, and old Frohburg entered. The most horrid expression of rage sat on his brow, and his empty iron scabbard rang, as, regardless of his children, he paced the stone floor with hurried steps. He seemed for some time to struggle in the vain attempt to speak, but at length, in a voice scarcely human, he shouted: 'Frederick, my son, rejoice! your father has nobly avenged your cause!'

Frederick's voice was heard, 'O God! and is it then all over; was she indeed guilty?'

Frohburg replied: 'She was indeed, but the viper eluded my grasp. The villain Thierstein I stabbed to the heart as, prostrate at her guilty feet, he was breathing forth his incestuous love!'

'O Charles!' wept Adelaide; 'is my Charles no more? Heaven have mercy on him!'

The stern Frohburg cried: 'Die, then, degenerate girl! and die unpitied if you can still feel for that perfidious villain. Frederick, I again repeat it to you, the villain was kneeling at Clara's feet, devouring her hand with his kisses, while she leant enraptured on his shoulder. In the very act my trusty brand pierced his perfidious heart, and his execrable paramour should have shared his fate had she not fled with all the speed of conscious guilt.'

Frederick made his father repeat over the horrid tale again and again till, overcome by the agony of his feelings, he rushed from the apartment.

It was long before the wretched Adelaide could be recalled to life, and when at last her scattered senses returned, it was only to announce her determination of immediately retiring to a convent, and there to devote her life to sorrow and penance.

CHAPTER III.

EARLY on the following day Frohburg repaired to Clara's apartments, which were in a remote angle of the Castle, where he learned that she had not been seen since the preceding evening—a circumstance which seemed to confirm her guilt, could he yet have entertained the slightest doubt of it. And when he sent some of his guards to fetch the body of Thierstein, it also had disappeared; and, although the spot where he had fallen was clotted with gore, no other trace of him remained. Wishing to consult with Frederick on this singular circumstance he now hastened to his apartment, but it also was empty, and one of his attendants informed him that he had seen the young Count leave the Castle in complete armour before the break of day; and when he would have sought for consolation in the arms of his daughter, he found her in a state little short of madness, imploring him to restore her Charles or let her take the veil.

We will now follow the steps of the unfortunate Frederick, who, unable to remain in a spot where everything tended to remind him of his lost Clara, had fled from the Castle, undetermined where to go, and anxious if possible to fly from his thoughts. His horse, whom he left to his own guidance, naturally took the road which he had been accustomed to travel almost daily for so many months, nor was Frederick at all conscious which way he was going till roused from his reverie by the noise of the workmen who were engaged in rebuilding the walls of Hagberg's Castle. He was hastening from a scene which reminded him still more forcibly of his misery, when the voice of Clara herself, conjuring him to halt, induced him to turn round; but a moment's reflection made

him clap spurs to his steed, and seek in flight his only safety. He continued to gallop for several hours, till his horse, overcome with fatigue, sank under him in the middle of an immense forest, into which he had now penetrated almost unconscious of the circumstance.

Having extricated himself from his horse, and seated himself by the side of a stream which gushed from some neighbouring rocks, he continued ruminating on his wayward fate, till wearied nature sought for rest.

Towards midnight he was awoke from his uneasy slumbers by a confused sound of human voices, and on starting up saw himself surrounded by a number of men clad in complete armour and each holding a blazing torch in his hand, who demanded what he wanted and what could have led him into this unfrequented part of the forest. To this inquiry Frederick indignantly replied, as one not used to have his actions scrutinised by persons of their dubious appearance, that his horse had brought him into this place, and that he was in search of what he was sorry to see he could not find—solitude.

A venerable knight who seemed to be the leader of the party, and whose grey locks might be discerned through the openings of his helmet, now advanced towards Frederick, and in a gentle voice thus addressed him :

'Young man, your reply and the device of your armour would speak you of some noble blood, but pardon me if I say that the finding you in your present situation would speak you either the outcast of your father's house, or else, as I would rather hope, the victim of some hopeless passion.

'If the latter is the case, I can feel for you ; and if you will swear that your blood is noble, that you are a true knight (as your arms would say), and that you have never disgraced the rules of that noble order, your appearance has so far interested me that I will believe your word and assist you to conquer your passion by active and honourable employment.'

The words and manner of the old knight in a moment disarmed Frederick of the scorn he had at first felt, and he hesitated not to take the oath required, adding : 'I have thus assured you of the honour of my birth, but must be permitted

to conceal my name. Suffice it to say that unmerited misfortune has driven me from the Castle of my fathers, and that in distance and in honourable war I would seek to bury the recollection of my misery.'

The chief knight now retired to a little distance, and seemed to converse in the most earnest manner with his followers, and in a little time he, returning, took Frederick by the hand and said: 'Young man, your wishes shall be obeyed; nor will we ever seek to inquire into your past life further than you yourself may choose to disclose. And now, if you please, you shall be admitted into our society, and may endeavour by change of scene to find a solace to your woes.'

Frederick, still doubtful of the character of his new acquaintances, hesitated for some time, but at length said: 'Swear then by the Great Power which created you that your views are honourable and noble, that virtue and honour guide your actions, that you will never require anything of me that may taint the lustre of my house or name, and that I shall be permitted to quit your society the moment I find your actions infringing on either; and here I devote myself and my sword to your service.'

'Come to my arms, thou noble youth, child of my adoption,' said the old knight; 'thy precaution does thee honour, and may curses shower down on these grey locks, and may ruin be the lot of me and these my noble fellows in arms, if ever we require of thee a deed to obscure the honours of thy noble house.'

The old knight now gave the order to mount, and the whole party, accompanied by Frederick, moved on. They pursued a path known only to themselves, and before evening had got beyond the precincts of the forest, when, turning to the right, they gained the great road leading to Swabia, which they continued to follow for the next two days. On the evening of the third they reached the bottom of a precipitous mountain, on the summit of which, half clothed in mist, and partly illumined by the rays of the setting sun, a majestic Castle rose to view. It was perched on the very summit of the mountain, and looking down on the valley of Swabia,

luxuriant with cultivation, reared its scathed and warlike front, seeming to enjoy a sullen repose from the wounds of war and time, and to tell the grandeur of those ages that beheld it in its strength. It had apparently been built several centuries before, and possessed all the rude and massive characters of that age, darkened by the injuries of time, and the gloom of antiquity. The ramparts, like piles of rock, the deep length of windowless wall, the turreted and embattled angles, the narrow-arched doors, crested with the defaced arms of the house and its alliances, some bearing the pedestals and some the remains of the gigantic statues that once frowned over them, and whose huge fragments obstructed the approach. All these seemed to realise the descriptions of fabulous romance, and fill the mind with melancholy awe and wild solemnity.

After climbing for some time a rugged path which wound among the immense oak trees that covered the hill, they at length reached the great gate of the Castle. Here the companions of Frederick struck the boss of their shields four distinct times, when a small opening over the portcullis grated on its hinges and a voice was heard saying, 'Is this the tread of the Lion?' 'It is,' was the answer, 'and he now seeks to enter his cavern.' To which the first voice again replied, 'Then welcome, but first retire to the great hall, and there wait the coming of the inquisitor.'

The massive gates were now flung open, and an immense number of squires and grooms appeared to take charge of the horses, and lead them to their stables.

'Stranger,' cried the elder knight to Frederick, 'take your sword and shield and follow me'; saying which he conducted him through several apartments, till they reached a small inner court. Here he desired him to wait till he should learn if the Lord of the Castle were willing to grant him the rights of hospitality, and, turning back as he was about to quit the court, he added in a manner which seemed to convey some secret meaning, 'Be watchful till my return.'

The manner in which this admonition was given, and the implied doubt of the rights of hospitality being granted to him,

for the first time inspired Frederick with unpleasant doubts as to the occupation of his new acquaintances; and these doubts were considerably increased when night arrived without his seeing or hearing of his conductor. He now endeavoured to get out by some of the numerous doors which he had remarked on his first entrance, but he found them all locked, nor could his utmost strength make any of them yield. He at last discovered a light which shone through a small loophole, and was about to knock at a door which seemed to lead to that part of the building, when he heard the voice of a female demanding help, and saying, 'Oh, mercy! mercy! kill me rather!'

Frederick now, with a degree of strength rendered more than human by righteous indignation, burst open the door, and, regardless of all danger, flew up a narrow staircase, and, entering a small apartment from whence the cries seemed to proceed, he beheld a young woman whom three ruffians holding by the hair seemed struggling to submit to their brutal lust.

'Villains, desist!' cried Frederick, 'or my sword shall make you pay the forfeit of your crimes!'

The scared villains shrank away, and the lady, springing from the ground, cried, 'Generous stranger! follow me, or your aid will have been in vain,' and, darting through an opposite door, overturned the lamp which stood on the table, and Frederick once more found himself in total darkness.

It was in vain that he endeavoured to discover the passage by which the lady had fled. He at length, after repeated attempts, gained the small staircase by which he had ascended, and once more found himself in the court where he had been originally conducted. He had scarce reached it when a blaze of light flashed on the steps which he had just descended, and a knight, clad in a magnificent suit of armour, appeared, followed by three others bearing torches in their hands.

'Are you the foolish stranger,' said the first, 'who had the daring insolence to threaten any of my dependants within my own walls, and dare you again repeat your insolent threats?'

'I dare,' replied Frederick, 'and will make them good on

you or any man who can vilely attempt to injure an unprotected female.'

The unknown knight now drew his sword and rushed upon Frederick, who, shunning the blow, struck the weapon from his nerveless grasp. But the three attendants, springing from behind, dragged the youth to the ground, and, in spite of his struggles, wrenched his sword from his hold.

The stranger called out, 'Ah, insolent boy! are you conquered now?'

'Yes,' said Frederick, 'as cowards and bravos conquer; and you are both, if you can sanction so foul an outrage.'

'Sanction!' said the stranger. 'Yes, both sanction and approve; foolhardy boys deserve no better treatment. Yet may you purchase your freedom, and retire unhurt, if you will swear never to reveal to mortal ear what you have this night seen; but, if you dare to hesitate, this minute shall you lose your life by the hands of the meanest of my slaves.'

'Murderer,' said Frederick in defiance, 'bring forth your executioner, this is my only answer.'

'Yet will I give you time,' exclaimed his foe; 'reflect, young man, how sweet that life is you would thus rashly throw away.'

'Begone!' cried Frederick, 'and know that to the virtuous mind a life of honour alone is sweet, but bitterer than the poisoned chalice if allied to shame.'

'Then let him die!' said the stranger, as the executioner advanced. 'Once more, will you accept my proffered terms and live?'

'Silence, foul fiend!' was Frederick's reply. 'Come, welcome death! To God I willingly yield up my soul.'

Two of the attendants now held Frederick by the shoulders, while the third had raised his sword, when the blast of a trumpet arrested the blow, and the knight and his slaves fled through a small door on the opposite side of the court from where the noise proceeded. Before Frederick could recover from the agreeable surprise which their precipitate flight had occasioned, the court was filled with armed men, among whom he immediately recognised the venerable knight who had conducted him to the Castle.

Frederick was about to have upbraided him with his cunning, when the old man advanced, and, taking him by the hand, begged leave to conduct him to the Lord of the Castle, who was anxious, as he said, to become acquainted with so brave a knight.

This Frederick positively refused, and insisted upon being immediately released, saying he wished not the acquaintance of a man in whose Castle woman's honour was disregarded, and the sacred duties of hospitality towards strangers grossly violated.

It was in vain that the stranger assured him that what he had witnessed, and what he himself had suffered, had been intended as a trial of his courage to ascertain whether or not he merited the honour of being admitted in their society. Frederick still insisted upon departing, till the old knight insinuated that his anxiety to depart arose from the recollection of what had passed, and the fear that still severer trials awaited him. The insinuation had the desired effect, and he exclaimed: 'Lead on, thou sifter of the human heart; I follow thee! Such a doubt alone could have induced me to trust you again.'

The knights now conducted him through a long passage supported by Saxon arches rudely carved, which seemed gradually to descend deeper and deeper into the bowels of the earth, till they at length reached a ponderous iron door, when the old knight turning to Frederick said: 'Having undergone your first trial, thus far may you go; but, ere you can advance one step further, you must take a solemn oath to observe all the duties of a true knight, to dedicate your life to the performance of them, and to obey implicitly every command which leads to honour and glory.' Frederick took the oath required, and the door was immediately opened from within.

With astonishment he now entered a spacious hall of immense length. On each side, upon pedestals, were placed the complete armoured figures of knights, one ironclad hand grasping a naked sword, and the other a blazing torch; while at the further end appeared a lofty throne, the dome and curtains of which were composed of yellow satin richly embroidered

with some unknown characters. At the foot of the steps leading to the throne were the figures of four immense lions composed of some shining metal, and in front was erected a platform covered with black velvet, on which lay a complete suit of armour, surrounded by innumerable lights.

Above a hundred knights were ranged on each side under the armour, and those who accompanied Frederick filed off as they entered to the right and left in perfect silence, and took their places beside the others.

In one corner was placed a solitary seat, to which the old knight conducted Frederick, telling him that now it was his turn to judge of them. Frederick seated himself in silence anxiously expecting what was to follow. Four strokes of a deep-toned bell were now heard, which were answered by the knights striking their swords four times upon the hollow of their shields.

A small door on the right of the apartment opened, and a knight clad in a gilt armour entered. On his head he wore a helmet surmounted by a couchant lion with expanded jaws, and over it a crest ornamented with the hair of a lion's mane. Two knights received him at the foot of the steps leading to the throne, and, removing his ponderous helmet, displayed a countenance expressive of the finest feelings. His head was thinly shaded by a few grey locks. Having ascended the throne, he in a deep tone repeated the word 'Welcome' four distinct times.

CHAPTER IV.

One of the knights first cried, 'The Lion has been wandering to see that peace and justice reigned upon earth.'

Another joined in, 'But he found the shepherd asleep, while wolves and tigers devoured the flock.'

Yet another said, 'He awoke the shepherd, he laid the tiger prostrate at his feet, and drew the teeth of the famished wolf; he now returns in triumph to his den.'

The oldest present called out, 'Welcome! welcome! welcome! welcome avenging lion! All hail to him who dries the widow's tears!'

Then all cried, 'Hail! hail! hail! hail!'

Again the ancient said, 'Blessed be he who avenges the orphan's cause.'

Again came the reply from all, 'Blessed! blessed! blessed! blessed!'

The spokesman continued, 'When peace was banished from the earth, four times forty knights united themselves to stem the torrent of blood and rapine; four moons have fulfilled their orbits since they last went forth.'

An inquisitor said, 'Approach and learn if they have fulfilled the sacred duties of their oath.'

A knight whose sword was ornamented with a lion's head approached the foot of the throne, and drew from the jaws of one of the brazen lions a roll of parchment, while the knights in the meantime separated themselves into four parties.

The inquisitor now said, 'To the east, and to the west, to the north, and to the south, did the avengers go. Avenger of the East! Speak, what hast thou done?'

The first knight spoke, 'I went to defend the lawful claims

of Philip to the Imperial throne. To me were due the successes at Bonn and Coblentz. Unassisted I entered the town of Strasburg, and forced its inhabitants to swear fealty and allegiance to their sovereign.'

The inquisitor continued, 'Well hast thou done thy duty! but does no blood of the innocent rust thy sword, or no widow's tears moisten thy shield?'

The first knight answered, 'No, we spared the blood of the innocent, and with our shields we covered the head of the widow.'

'Rest then awhile,' was the reply, 'from your labours, till the voice of the oppressed again requires the succour of your arm. Avenger of the West! what hast thou done?'

Another knight spoke: 'I went forth to quell the pride of old Beichringen, who, by unjust feuds, sought to augment his domains. He had ravaged the fields of his neighbours, and, attacking their houses in the dead hour of night, carried them into bondage. But I joined the standard of the oppressed, and in their name demanded restitution of the unjust plunder and freedom for the captives. The hoary villain answered my demands with scorn, so I took his Castle by storm, knocked the chains from the captives, and divided the plunder among them.'

Again came the question, 'What didst thou do with the offender?'

The second knight replied: 'He refused to give his knightly word never again to molest his neighbours; I therefore gave him in ward to those he had oppressed, there to continue till his pride was humbled, and he had learned to obey the laws of the empire. Twelve orphans of these horrid feuds I have brought along with me to be provided for and educated by our sacred order.'

'Well hast thou done!' exclaimed the inquisitor, 'thanks to thee in the name of all.'

Then cried they all, 'Thanks! thanks! thanks! thanks to the stay of the widow and the orphan!'

The question then came, 'Avenger of the North! what hast thou done?'

The third knight made answer: 'I went to Buchsau to protect Friedau's widow against the insolent demands of her neighbours, who had seized on half her property as their right. In her name I offered a compromise. It was accepted, and her lands restored. Thus have I returned without drawing my sword or risking the lives of my followers.'

'Hail! hail! hail! hail to the voice of reason which saved the lion's blood!'

And, all in chorus, 'Hail! hail! hail! hail to the knight of peace!'

'Rest then in quiet,' said the inquisitor, 'till the voice of the injured again demands your aid. Avenger of the South! where hast thou been?'

The old knight, who had conducted Frederick to the Castle now rose and answered, 'I was sent forth to punish the degenerate knights who had filled Helvetia's plains with desolation and, ruffian-like, deprived the husband of his wife, the parent of his daughter.'

'And how hast thou fulfilled these thy sacred orders?' asked the inquisitor. 'Does the tear of the grateful heart glisten on thy shield, and does your sword reek with the blood of the destroyer? But chiefly is the blood of Hagberg, our noble brother, amply avenged?'

The fourth knight replied, 'We have forced the robber to restore his prey, but the death of Hagberg we could not revenge.'

'Disgrace to our order, hasten to return! the blood of the murdered, the tear of the widow and the orphan, still cry aloud to heaven for vengeance, against his dastard brother who trembled to avenge his fall. Hasten then to wipe out this vile blot upon your honour, while we watch over our murdered brother's arms and mourn his fate.'

The fourth knight boldly answered, 'I had, indeed, been wretched could I have merited this charge; but, thanks to heaven, the lion's step is only seen in the path of honour. I hastened to the valley of Iffen, determined to revenge a brother's fall or share his fate; but Frohburg had already punished the assassin, and saved the mother and her babes.

Ere we reached the spot his Castle was already rising from its ruins, and report spoke of the widow's marriage to Count Frohburg's son.'

'Hail to the noble Frohburg!' said the commanding figure who put these questions, 'who, bound by no oath as we are, has yet protected the helpless, and punished their destroyer.'

Again all cried, 'Hail! hail! hail! hail to Count Frohburg and his noble son!'

'Rest, then, in peace,' said the questioner. 'The first object of your expedition has been fully accomplished; but you received yet another mandate. Have you accomplished it? Have you found one worthy to fill Hagberg's place, or must his armour still be untenanted upon that bier?'

The fourth knight said: 'In vain I sought among the neighbouring nobles. None could I find willing to forego their comforts, or incur the resentment of the wicked for their country's good. I was returning in despair, when chance conducted me to a knight whom virtuous sorrow had driven to seek for consolation in death. By the path of glory have I weaned him back to this world; and it now rests with you, our venerable father, to decide if he be worthy to enjoy the protection of the Lion, or to fight under his banners.'

'His claims shall be heard,' said the questioner, 'and his fate decided anon,' and he continued bowing to the old man upon the throne. 'Father of the Lion, my duty is fulfilled.'

The ancient then said, 'Sons of the Lion, ye have done nobly, and deserve repose; but your courage must never flag nor your body seek for rest while the needy and oppressed require your aid. Accuser, come forth, and say who suffers unmerited oppression, and who riots in splendid impunity.'

A knight, from whose neck the figure of a lion was suspended by a chain of massive gold, now advanced to the foot of the throne, and drew from the mouth of the second lion a roll of parchment. Then, bowing to the throne while he drew his sword, said, 'I complain of wickedness and injustice. I call for vengeance on oppression and misplaced power!'

All the knights drew their swords, and exclaimed, 'We pledge ourselves to punish and revenge!'

'Whom dost thou accuse?' asked the old man.

The accuser replied: 'Otto, the unanointed of God!—Otto, whom none but traitors acknowledge as their emperor; he who continues to bid defiance to Philip, his lawful sovereign! —Otto, under whose wings anarchy lifts her giant head, while the blood of the innocent impregnates the earth!'

'Let, then, a double force assist to pull this traitor down,' called out the ancient. 'Avenger of the East, and thou Avenger of the West, hasten to Philip's tents, that peace may be restored to our country, and her children bless the sons of the Lion.'

The first and second knight said, 'We go to protect the father of his country, and avenge his wrongs.'

The accuser said: 'Count Neuenberg is dead. Report says he fell by the hand of his wife, who now pollutes his ancient Castle with her adulterous love, and has buried his lovely daughter, the lawful heir of all his wealth, within a cloister's walls, the better to provide for her expected bastards. Who will punish this adulterous wretch, and restore the helpless orphan to the inheritance of her father?'

Frederick, overcome by his feelings, cried out: 'Noble knight! that will I. I will undertake this deed of noble vengeance.'

The old man said: 'Hail to the noble stranger! Young man, I rejoice to see that thou hast a heart to feel for, and a hand ready to avenge, the innocent and unprotected. The time may come when I shall call for both. Avenger of the South, thou shalt go to punish the murderers of Neuenberg, and restore his injured daughter.'

The accuser said: 'In the very precincts of the Lion's den, oppression walks abroad in the face of day, and plunder and rapine steal abroad by night.'

'Avenger of the North,' said the ancient, 'see that you remove this nest of vipers, and let no sound be heard save the voice of gladness.'

All cried: 'Hail! hail! hail! hail to the son of glory,

who never rests while wickedness triumphs and innocence weeps!'

Again said the old man: 'Sons of the Lion, lower your swords, and lay aside your harness. For four days may you rest from your labours till fresh vigour has again strung your nerves for the defence of the weak. The flowing cup now awaits you in the banqueting hall; but, ere we obey the call, we must remove this sad memorial of our departed brother, and fill his empty armour. Lead the stranger forth. Noble stranger, this night we have put your courage to the test, and the result has proved you worthy to enter this hall, when in your turn you might judge of us. You have now heard what was spoken; then say, how do our actions please you?'

Frederick exclaimed, 'I honour and esteem them.'

'Are you then willing,' asked the old man, 'to enter into our order? Are you ready to swear vengeance against vice, wherever it may be found, and to devote your sword to the protection of innocence? Speak, for your choice is yet free.'

'Yes, venerable old man,' said Frederick, 'I am! But yet one question more—must I wear the armour of the murdered Hagberg, and must I become the protector of his widow?'

'Even so.'

'What!' cried Frederick, 'even should her actions prove her unworthy of such protection?'

'No! then should our protection cease and our vengeance follow her.'

Then said Frederick: 'Receive me, then, into your order; under such banners I long to fight.'

'Then lead him hence!'

Two knights now advanced and conducted Frederick to the door of the hall, which was immediately closed after them. After passing through a long, low gallery, different from that by which he had entered, they led him into a small chamber. No sooner, however, had he entered, than his conductors, fastening the door after them, escaped without uttering a word.

Frederick, surprised, but not alarmed, began now to examine the apartment, which seemed as if intended for a prison; as, by the light of a lamp which stood upon the table, he perceived a pitcher of water and a piece of bread. Soon after, a knight, clad in sable garments, entered the small apartment, carrying under his arm a book bound in black velvet and ornamented with death's heads. Trimming the lamp which flared with the wind, he said, 'Stranger, canst thou write?' Frederick answering in the affirmative, the stranger desired him to insert in that book his name, age, and condition, and then immediately departed, fastening the door by which he retired on the outside. Curiosity induced Frederick to examine the contents of the volume in which he had been desired to insert his name, and he was not a little surprised to find an infinite number of names of men of all conditions, evidently written in a variety of hands, while annexed to each—but in one uniform character—appeared an annotation mentioning that the person had expired upon the third, fourth, or fifth day, and after some were added these words: 'He never survived his fall, but died upon the spot.'

This obituary, as it may be called, raised some unpleasant sensations in the mind of Frederick, nor did the title of the volume at all tend to relieve them. It was called, 'A List of those who, blinded by the mummery of the Lion, have been enveigled into his den and murdered.' While he was perusing this dreadful list, to which he now feared his own name must soon be added, he imagined he felt the floor shake under him—but, before he had time to think from whence it could proceed, the whole sank with a loud crash, and he was precipitated into a deep cavern.

Stunned by the violence of his descent, he lay insensible for some time, and on recovering his senses found himself grasped by a cold hand. Shuddering, he withdrew his arm, when a sepulchral voice addressed him, saying:

'Whoever you are, thank heaven that I have reached you. I heard your fall, and with the utmost difficulty have dragged myself to this spot, in hopes of finding you uninjured, and I shall think myself blessed if I can assist a fellow creature to

escape from and detect the horde of merciless cut-throats and robbers who inhabit this Castle. This is now the sixth day that I languish in this dreadful cavern, amid piles of mouldering carcases. Like you, I was precipitated through the trap, and my thigh broken in the fall. Thank heaven, I can feel that the final close of all my misery is fast approaching, and I shall die in peace if able to make you profit by a discovery I have made. Stranger, at the further end of the cavern on your left hand, you will find a fissure in the rock through which you may clamber. My broken limb prevented me from benefiting by the discovery, but I could at least breathe the pure air of heaven; I could hear the voices of the woods. O God! I feel the pangs of approaching dissolution. Stranger, fly, and oh, avenge my death!'

When the voice ceased, Frederick groped about, and his hand rested upon the face of a human being, which felt cold to the touch, and appeared neither to breathe nor move; and thus the last hope that he had still cherished, that all he had suffered had been but another trial of his courage, was now completely banished. Breathing, therefore, a silent prayer for the soul of the deceased, he proceeded to grope his way in the direction which had been described to him. With the utmost difficulty he reached the side of the cavern, which he continued to follow, fearful of losing his way, and often treading on what he conceived to be the body of some murdered passenger, while his foot frequently slipped on some nauseous reptile. At length, however, his eye caught the distant glimmering of daylight, but so faint that he durst scarcely credit the certainty of it, till on passing a projecting point of the rock, which had hitherto intercepted his view, he beheld the light of the morning through a lofty crevice of the rock. Assisted by the straggling branch of a tree, he soon scrambled to the top, and once more found himself in the open air.

Frederick, however, now found that he had only escaped from one danger to fall into another, for on examination he found himself in a narrow passage, enclosed by the walls of the Castle on one side, and on the others by a perpendicular rock, beyond the power of human strength to climb. The

further end of the path was closed by a low iron door, which resisted every effort he made to force it open, but, despair urging him to repeated attempts, it at length yielded. Even now, however, his difficulties were not at an end, as he found himself on the brink of a horrid chasm, down which an impetuous torrent rolled. Conscious, however, that the door through which he had passed, and which had been fastened with such care, must lead to some outlet, he examined the edge of the precipice with the most minute attention, and at length perceived some small steps cut into the face of the solid rock. These he was obliged to descend with the utmost caution, frequently supporting himself by projecting pieces of the rock, or roots of trees, and at others by his dagger, which he introduced into the crevices, and at length, after infinite difficulty, reached the edge of the water. Searching around, he perceived steps similar to those by which he had descended cut on the opposite side, and having with imminent danger forded the torrent he began to climb them. They were in several places worn away by the dashing of the cataract, and, owing to the ooze with which they were covered, Frederick was frequently on the point of falling back into the abyss. He, however, at length reached the summit, and hastened down a pathway apparently but little frequented, as it had more the appearance of a ravine than of a road. As he advanced he perceived a thick smoke, which rendered him for some time uncertain whether he ought to proceed or not, but conscious that his only hopes of escape depended on his advancing, and trusting that at this early hour of the morning there would be few or none near the fire (whatever it might be) he determined on proceeding.

As he advanced, with cautious steps, he perceived an immense heap of blazing wood, reaching entirely across the path, and even piled up against the rocks on either side, but, inspired with the hopes of regaining his liberty, he rushed on and burst through the flames, without meeting with any material injury. The path now wound through the oak trees at the foot of the mountain, and, after following it for some time, Frederick's eyes were blessed with the delightful prospect of

the rich plains of Swabia. As he hastened onwards, he was suddenly arrested by the voice of a hermit, who was offering up his morning orisons at the mouth of his cell, and who earnestly begged of Frederick to enter and partake of his simple fare; and, although anxious to hasten from the neighbourhood of the hated Castle, Frederick found it impossible to resist the hermit's importunities. Beyond the outer cell which they entered appeared a door leading to a second, through which the hermit retired to prepare their frugal meal, requesting Frederick in the meantime to amuse himself by reading the inscriptions affixed to the rock. These were four tablets of black marble, on which were cut in gilded letters the following sentences:

On the first—

(*Prov.* xiv. 15.)—'The simple believeth every word; but the prudent man looketh well to his going.'

On the second—

(*Prov.* xvii. 3.)—'The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; but the Lord trieth the hearts.'

On the third was written—

(*Stat. Equ. Leon.* C. iv.)—'The valorous man feareth neither the flaming fire, nor the raging torrent, neither hesitates he on the edge of the abyss, but flies over it like a bird of the air; and to save the unhappy and to set the captive free he defies all the elements, for which the blessing of the Lord attends him.'

And on the last—

'Liberty is a luscious fruit; the more difficult it is to attain the sweeter it is. Hail, then, to the noble knight who has obtained it, and four times all hail to him who returns to his obedience, and resigns that liberty for which he strove so nobly! Reflect!—Prove!—Decide!'

Frederick was still wondering in his mind what could be the secret meaning evidently contained in the above apothegms when the hermit returned with some wine and dried fruits. To his inquiries of who had desired those tablets to be fixed there the hermit replied that they had been placed there by the lord of the neighbouring Castle, with strict injunctions

that no knight should be allowed to pass without reading or hearing their contents.

'It is now six years,' continued the hermit, 'since I have inhabited this cell, and in that time I have seen only three pass this way. Like thee they read the sacred tablets. Obeying their injunctions they returned to the Castle of my patron. Wisely did they act,' continued the hermit, bursting into enthusiasm, 'for he is at once the boast and guardian of his country. Under his powerful arm the poorest peasant enjoys the sweets of freedom, and the proud oppressor trembles in his palace.'

'Old man,' interrupted Frederick, 'if thou liest——'

'If I do, or if I speak more than half his worth,' continued the old man, 'may these grey locks descend in sorrow to the grave, may the Almighty remove His protecting arm in the hour of want, and may hell itself gape to ingulf me.'

'Then,' cried Frederick, in a determined tone, 'lead on to the Castle. I long to follow thee.'

The hermit conducted him to a path which wound upwards in a spiral direction towards the fortress, and as he said would lead him directly to the gate of the Castle, and reminding him as he passed to observe a statue of St. Mark, then breathing over him his blessing, he retired.

CHAPTER V.

FREDERICK followed the path which had been pointed out, and soon found himself opposite the statue of the Saint. It was cut in white marble, and leant gracefully forward towards the pathway, holding in its right hand a wreath of laurel, as if to crown the passing stranger, while the statuary's art had expressed upon the countenance a heavenly smile. At the foot of the Saint lay a couchant lion holding in his mouth a scroll on which was written:

'Stranger! the hand of thy Heavenly Father has guided and protected thee through four trials, go on with confidence; the same power will yet protect thee through the last.'

'So then,' thought Frederick, 'my probation is not yet closed.' But he resolutely advanced till his further progress was arrested by a small iron door which evidently led immediately within the body of the fortress. To reach it he had to cross a kind of bridge covered with a tessellated pavement; but ere he could arrive at the door he heard beneath his feet a sound like the rushing back of mighty bolts and the platform sinking under him. He was again precipitated into a dark abyss. He lay for some time in a state of insensibility occasioned by the shock of his descent, when suddenly on the ringing of a bell an immense chandelier, hung with innumerable lamps, was lowered from above, and instead of a cavern into which he had conceived he had fallen, Frederick found himself reclined on a species of couch which had been purposely placed to break his fall. He was surrounded by several knights who gently raised him, while more than a hundred voices shouted: 'Welcome! Commander and Avenger of the noble Order of the Lion.'

Frederick had now time to look around him, and was surprised to find himself in a magnificent hall. On a throne still more superb than the former appeared the old commander, while ranged around him stood the knights, each wearing over his armour a richly embroidered cloak. On a table covered with black velvet, and supported by brazen lions lay four immense volumes. The old man now descended from his throne and addressed the wondering Frederick as follows:

'Noble and valorous knight! Look around you and observe!' Four different avenues lead to this hall, but few like thee have entered by that which leads to glory and reward. Then four times welcome to my arms. But that you may know that the trials you have undergone and the dangers you have passed were not intended as wanton experiments upon your valour, learn that our laws require that none should be admitted into our sacred order whose courage has not been proved beyond the reach of doubt. And that none should dare to seek its highest honours who had not proved his frame insensible to all the evils of this sublunary world, and his mind superior to the weaknesses of frail humanity. He, therefore, who shrinks in the first trials, who listens unmoved to the tear of beauty, or fears to defend it at the hazard of his life, can never hope to join our order; but if he shows a heart alive to the voice of pity, and a hand ready to protect, like you, he is admitted to our presence.

'In the voice of the examiner and the accuser he hears the duties of our order explained, and is then (if he so chooses) permitted to enter our sacred fraternity. But still fresh trials await him, an ordeal to ascertain to what honours his virtues entitle him. If he passes through the next trial, when his mother earth receives him and his senses are attacked by varied forms of horror, he is admitted a brother of our order, but can have no share in its councils, or aspire to any of its higher offices' [*here the loud tone of a bell was heard four times repeated, and a division of the knights retired*] 'and like those who have now retired must remain ignorant of the ordeals which the others passed. Should his courage induce him to pass the third trial and not to shrink from the abyss

that yawns before him, he is then admitted a silent member to our secret councils, but cannot claim the honour of leading to the field' [*here the bell was again heard, and another division of the knights retired*] 'so must he also like them remain ignorant of the other trials he feared to encounter. If the candidate, reckless of danger, still boldly treads the path of glory, regardless of the ruggedness of the way, or the fire that would check his progress, then may he claim the highest orders, save only the place of commander-in-chief or of avenger.' [*The sound of the bell now called away another division.*] 'For these are denied to such as would not listen to the hermit's prayer or who despised the secret admonition contained in the tablets, and reserved for the few who like thee, noble youth, having spurned at every danger, and conquered every human difficulty, prove themselves alike devoid of mean suspicion, and are cherished in our heart of hearts.

'The Lion owns himself their debtor, and with perfect confidence he looks up to them as those destined to transmit to latest ages the honour of his name untarnished. Then speak, noble youth, and say are you willing to join the standard of the Lion, and swear fidelity and obedience to his behests?'

Frederick fell prostrate at the feet of the old warrior, and accepted with joy the proffered honour.

The great bell was now rung and the knights of the first order entered, bearing a standard.

The old knight commanded: 'Leader of the first order, adorn the noble candidate with the marks of *thy* dignity.'

A superb helmet was now placed on Frederick's head, adorned with rich openwork of gold.

'Thou wert buried in darkness,' continued the old knight, 'but by thy own intrinsic courage wert restored to light. In remembrance of this, wear ever this open helmet, and through its fretwork may thy enemy tremble at the fire of thy glance, but never in life must he see thy back. Such does the Lion expect from every son.'

The knights of the first order now retired leaving their standard upon the table, and on the second stroke of the bell

the knights of the next order appeared, bearing their standard, and, having presented Frederick with a sword, the old knight continued:

'As you shrank not from the beetling cliff, nor recoiled from the roar of the torrent, so must you ever withstand the fury of the wicked, and may the image of the Lion which crowns this sword ever remind you of your sacred duties.'

The bell now sounding three times the knights retired, leaving their standard on the table, and made way for those of the third who entered, and their leader having presented Frederick with a crest of white plumes, the old knight again addressed him saying:

'Let these plumes adorn your helmet, and ever serve as a rallying point for your followers in the field of glory, and waving aloft guide them to victory.'

These now retired in the same order as the former at the sound of the bell, and another division, but infinitely smaller in number, approached, and having in like manner presented Frederick with a massive collar to which was suspended a lion as the emblem of the order, the old knight, continued:

'Noble youth, you are now girt with the order of the Lion, and may you ever imitate the nobleness of his character, while you share his courage; may you long live to wear this collar in honour and in glory, and woe to you and our whole order should it ever fall into the hands of an enemy!'

The last division now retired leaving their gilded banner, when the old man and seven remaining knights conducted Frederick to the bottom of the table. They spread out the four banners, on each of which on rich embroidery was represented one of the Evangelists, lying on each one of the sacred volumes.

'Knight of the four orders,' said the old man addressing Frederick, 'repeat distinctly the solemn oath that must now be administered to you.' A knight then read the following oath, which Frederick repeated after him in a solemn voice:

'I, Count Frederick of Frohburg, do swear by the Almighty Father Who created me, that I now enter freely and unconstrained into the sacred order of the Lion, and that I

will do all that in me lies to fulfil its ordinances. I swear to combat vice wherever I may meet it, that my shield shall ever be stretched to protect the innocent, and that I will ever be ready to dry the tear, and avenge the wrongs of the widow and orphan. I swear to reverence the name of God and to keep it holy, and should I ever perjure myself or renounce this sacred oath now voluntarily taken may the earth swallow me up quick; may the winds of heaven blow the very traces of me from the face of the earth; may the fire consume the records of my name; and may every earthly possession flow away from me and from my descendants like the torrent of the mountains! On the four holy Evangelists do I lay my hand, and by the four Archangels do I swear to keep this my oath, and may God and the Blessed Trinity hear and bless my vow, as I keep it sacred.—Amen.'

As Frederick concluded, a venerable priest entered the hall, and baring the breast and shoulder of the young knight, poured over them the consecrated oil.

'Such,' said the commander, 'is the final reward of the few who like thee after encountering so many dangers return to us with confidence. This sacred oil will shelter thee in the hour of battle, and protect thee from every danger. Four years must thou now devote exclusively to the duties of thy order. On the fifth thou mayest return to the house of thy father, and the calls of thy family. But remember that even then the good of the order must be regarded as thy first duty. Ever must thou be in readiness to lend thy aid to the Lion and fly to his support, when thou shalt hear his voice. Thou art now a leader, and mayest choose which way to go, to the east, to the west, to the north or to the south.

'Obedient to thy will,' said Frederick, 'I am ready to lend my aid wherever thou mayest think it needed, but if left solely to decide for myself, I would hasten to punish the adulterous wife of the murdered Neuenberg and give repose to his troubled ghost.'

The old man continued: 'Then shalt thou go to the south after four days given to rest, and to the celebration of the feast of our order. But ere I assemble all our brethren, I

would instruct thee in some of the customs of our order which are more immediately required. As for the others they are contained in these archives, which thou mayest con and study at thy leisure. Take, then, this crest torn from a lion's mane, and ever wear it on thy helmet. It will serve to point thee out to every brother of our order as one of the anointed; and at meeting and at parting they must bend the knee to whoever wears it, as a token of obedience and respect due to those who are destined to command them. In the banqueting hall thou must take thy place with me and these your seven brothers-in-arms, while those of the first order wait upon thy orders.'

When the old man ceased, four strokes of the bell summoned the whole of the knights into the hall. On entering they wondered to behold Frederick thus adorned with the highest marks of dignity, and, as they bent the knee, thanked him for the glorious example he had shown them. Frederick received these tokens of respect with blushing diffidence, while within himself he determined that, renouncing every softer feeling, he would henceforth devote his whole life to the pursuit of glory.

CHAPTER VI.

As it was yet early in the day, the knights now dispersed themselves in different directions, while the old chief, leaning on Frederick's arm, conducted him to a magnificent garden belonging to the Castle, when the following conversation began.

The old man inquired: 'You are the eldest son of Count Frohburg?'

'Yes,' said Frederick, 'his son and heir.'

'Then do I congratulate our order on the honour it has this day received, and doubt not that through you its power and consequence will be greatly increased.'

Frederick answered: 'I doubt it not, but not through me, but because I know the nature of my father's heart.'

'His heart, I am certain,' said his aged companion, 'must be noble and his affection most sincere. It is a sin, then, to allow him to remain any longer uncertain as to your fate. Write therefore to him immediately, and I will take care that his answer shall reach you wherever you may be.'

'Thanks, noble Sir,' said Frederick, 'to you then shall I owe a father's blessing to strengthen my arm in the hour of battle.'

'And now, my young friend, you must pardon my curiosity if I ask you a few questions on a very different subject. Hagberg's widow, I have heard, was once dear to you, but I have also heard that you found her false. Are you very certain, then, of her infidelity?'

Frederick shuddered. 'Alas! but too certain; but oh, my good lord, spare me on this dreadful subject, my wounds are yet too fresh.'

'For shame, young man, you who shrink not from the fiercest war of the elements, or death itself, thus to tremble at the remembrance of a woman's falsehood! Shame, shame!'

Frederick at length yielded, and although his voice often faltered, and the tear rolled unbidden down his cheek, related to the old knight the story of his love, from his first acquaintance with Clara to the hour of Thierstein's death.

'Your father, Count Frederick, I am sorry to say, has on this occasion shown more of the blind impetuosity of youth than of the prudent caution which should have marked his years.'

'Oh,' said the youth; 'oh, good sir, did he not with his own eyes witness their guilt?'

'And yet,' replied the other, 'I think their every action might be accounted for without the slightest imputation on the honour of either. Did not you yourself, Count Frederick, bind both your sister and the unfortunate Thierstein to defer their own happiness till Clara should bestow her hand on you?'

'I do not deny it.'

'Well, then, suppose that Thierstein had often vainly pleaded your cause with Clara, and that at length, when she was induced to yield to his persuasions and the sacred pleadings of her own heart, might she not, like other women, wish to heighten your delight by an agreeable surprise? Think of this, and think also if some festive day that was immediately to follow might not render such a wish probable.'

Frederick in agitation replied: 'Almighty God! I now remember the following day was the anniversary of my own birth, and tremble to hear the rest.'

'Your fears, my young friend, are but too well founded. Your Clara had at length yielded to the persuasion of Thierstein, and was only anxious to arrange with him how the discovery might be made most acceptable to you. Your evil genius prevented that opportunity. She was therefore obliged to write and request him to meet her in the garden, and he was actually on his knees thanking her for having acceded to *your* wishes, when your father, deceived by appearances, and

blinded by his passion, pierced the heart of the generous Thierstein.'

'O God!' cried the young man, 'it is but too clear; my poor Clara then was innocent. I now remember that when we parted on that fatal night, she desired me, smiling, to recollect my dreams, and that next morning would perhaps prove that they might sometimes be relied on. Have I then wronged such heavenly innocence? Oh, she can never forgive me! I do not deserve that she should.'

At that moment a female sprang from a neighbouring bower, and threw herself into the arms of Frederick. It was Clara herself who, pressing him to her bosom, exclaimed: 'Yet she forgives thee, and could die contented since she is justified in the eyes of her Frederick.'

The old knight now left the lovers to enjoy all the sweets of a perfect reconciliation, while Frederick on his knees entreated her pardon for having ever doubted her honour. They would have enjoyed their happiness in its fullest extent, but that it was embittered by the remembrance of the generous Thierstein's unmerited fate, and the sorrows of the wretched Adelaide.

When they were in some degree composed Clara related to Frederick that, having fled from the fury of his father, she was on the point of writing to him to explain the awful mistake, when she actually saw him under the walls of her Castle.

She had flown after him, she added, and, learning that he had taken the road leading to Swabia, had followed him for three days, but feared she had lost every trace of him, when she accidentally learned that a knight wearing a blue scarf had been seen to enter the fortress of the Lion with several of the knights of that order. She thither pursued him, and, being announced as Hagberg's widow, had been received with the highest marks of respect by the venerable old knight, who had listened to her tale and promised to clear her innocence.

The great bell of the Castle at last announced that the feast was served, and the lovers were obliged to separate, the rules of the order permitting no woman to dine in the knights' hall. The moment that the parting cup had passed

round, Frederick hastened to the apartments of the women, where he was presented by Clara to the lady of the Castle, a venerable old matron, and her two daughters, both blooming in all the pride of youth and beauty. One of these complimented the new knight upon having on the badges of the highest dignities of the order, with which she was perfectly acquainted; and Clara turning round for the first time observed, hanging by Frederick's side, the sword of Hagberg, on which her own name was ciphered in precious stones, nor could she refrain the tribute of a tear to the memory of one who had loved her so well. This did not escape the observation of the rest of the party, and the younger daughter wishing to turn the conversation, said to Frederick with a playful smile:

'Sir Knight, you who are ornamented with so many badges of honour might surely spare one of them for an unfortunate acquaintance of mine who has been long striving in vain for even the meanest of them.' Her eldest sister, blushing, endeavoured to interrupt the arch girl, but she proceeded: 'Nay, sister, I must make a confidant of this noble knight, and who knows but he may prove of the utmost service to you?'

'Forgive me,' said Clara, 'if I interfere; but, my gentle Bertha, you are quite right in not wishing the sprightly Agnes to betray your secrets to the Count; but should you ever think me worthy of your confidence you may with safety deposit them in my bosom, and should Frederick's assistance be deemed necessary, I will then apply to him, and spare your blushes.'

In this manner the happy party continued to amuse themselves, the venerable mother often joining with all the playfulness of youth in their conversations, till the great bell sounding the hour of four reminded Frederick of his duty. On entering the council hall he found the knights of the third and fourth orders deliberating as to the most advisable means of bringing to a happy issue, and with the loss of as little human blood as possible, their projected expeditions.

Frederick was instructed in the manner in which he should fulfil the undertaking committed to his charge, and it

was agreed that Count Neuenberg's Castle being situated on an impregnable rock, he must attempt it by surprise, and that the chaplain of the old Count, who was already acquainted with their design, would be ready to admit the avengers by a postern. Frederick, now rendered cautious by his own dear-bought experience, inquired if the infidelity of Neuenberg's widow had been ascertained beyond a possibility of doubt. To this the old man answered that, although he highly approved of their young brother's caution, yet he feared there remained no possibility of doubting, as her accusers were holy men, of the most undoubted veracity, and who had long lived under Neuenberg's protection. He, however, advised Frederick to gain possession of the fortress, but not to draw the sword of the avenger while the slightest point remained uncleared.

While Frederick was thus engaged, the gentle Bertha, profiting by Clara's proffered friendship, had carried her to her own apartment, and then, after thanking her with tears for her kindnesses, she confessed that her affections had long been fixed upon Count Weisenborn, a neighbouring baron, and that her father, regardless of his extensive domains, had refused to sanction the connection unless he should first become a member of their order. To this her lover had gladly acceded, but failing in the trial, as she feared, for Weisenborn had maintained the most inviolable secrecy on the subject, her father had positively prohibited her ever seeing him again.

'Overcome at length by my tears,' continued Bertha, 'my stern sire has promised that after two more years devoted to the pursuit of honour in the bloody field, Weisenborn shall be again admitted as a candidate, and it is but now, my beloved Clara, that I have learned that he is at present in disguise in the fortress of Neuenberg, determined to aid the Countess against the vile machinations of some rapacious monks. May I then entreat you, by the sacred name of friend which you have kindly granted me, to endeavour to soften my stern father and shorten the period of Weisenborn's probation?'

Clara readily acceded to the wishes of Bertha, and, as soon as she saw Frederick, communicated what had passed, and

entreated him to join his eloquence to hers in favour of the gentle Bertha. Frederick promised in general terms to assist them as far as his duty would permit, but would not confess even to Clara that he feared the knight was now engaged in a cause which would redound but little to his honour.

The four days which had been dedicated to festivity passed rapidly by, and the evening of the fourth, when the knights must bid adieu to all their friends, was already arrived. It was with the utmost difficulty that Frederick could drag himself from the arms of his beloved Clara, and it was in vain that he endeavoured to console her by the assurance that he would soon return to her and happiness. He then went to take leave of the old Countess and her daughters, and, when Bertha's turn came, a tear started into her eye as she said, 'May happiness attend you,' and then added in a lower tone: 'Remember my petition, gentle knight, and my prayers shall join the lovely Clara's for your safe and speedy return.' Frederick bowed a graceful assent and retired.

The following morning as the loud bell of the Castle struck four, all the knights were assembled in the great hall. The noise of warlike preparations resounded on every side. Squires and grooms were seen hastening to arrange their pennons and the housings of their horses, while at intervals was heard the sound of the anvil as the armourers were fastening the rivets or altering some part of the warlike accoutrements. The venerable old knight, attended by the priest who had anointed Frederick, ascended the throne, and, drawing his sword, cried 'Noble Lion, arouse! arouse! arouse! arouse!'

The accuser stepped forth. 'Thy wrath has been justly kindled. The wolf and the tiger prowl within the fold; rouse thy strength and lay them at thy feet.'

The ancient added: 'Mighty Lion, just even in thy vengeance, hasten to the field.'

All the knights drawing their swords called aloud: 'To the field! to the field! to the field! to the field!'

'Go forth,' said the priest lifting his hands on high, 'go forth, then, under the protection of God and His holy saints, for as He is the stay of the orphan, and the protector of the

widow, so will His mighty arm protect those who represent Him on earth.' May His divine blessing then attend you, may His blessing protect you in the field, and guide you back in safety and in honour to these walls.'

The knights bending their knees fervently repeated an 'Amen' four times to the prayer of the old priest.

The venerable elder said: 'To the east and to the west, to the north and to the south, is innocence heard to weep; then hasten to dry her tears that she may bless the name of the Lord. And haste, the trumpet calls, the courser snorts impatient for the field; then let the sons of the Lion hasten to glorious death or victory.'

The knights, repeating their beloved leader's last words, rushed to the great court of the Castle, and here, as they with difficulty reined in their impatient steeds, the priest and the venerable old chief bending from the casement breathed a parting blessing, while the ladies from the opposite side, wiping the tear from their eyes, whispered a gentle farewell which was interrupted by the blasts of the trumpet.

CHAPTER VII.

On reaching the great road the different troops separated, and Frederick, heading his column, bent his steps towards the south. Three days' march brought them within sight of Neuenberg's fortress, where, in pursuance of the plan previously arranged, Frederick encamped his men under the covert of a thick wood, while he sent to announce his arrival to the chaplain, who had promised to wait their coming in a neighbouring hermit's cell. Punctual to his appointment Frederick's emissaries found him in attendance, and immediately brought him to his presence.

'Hail! noble knight,' he said, 'long and anxiously expected, for the hopes of soon beholding the avenger of wickedness could alone have made me so long to sojourn in this Sodom and Gomorrha.'

'I greet you well, holy father; how goes it in the Castle?' asked Frederick.

'Sin rears her hydra head and gains strength daily, and though the widow's paramour revels the live-long day in sensual joys, and at nights pillows his guilty head on her adulterous bosom, yet does he not neglect the means of his defence, and ere a month had gathered within the walls of the fortress a band of mercenary troops and bowmen. But my cunning has undermined all his schemes, for, taking advantage of the laziness of their natures, I breathed into their ears how disgraceful it were to fight in such a cause, laying before them the foul sins of Neuenberg's widow and her adulterous paramour, and thus have persuaded the greater part to withdraw themselves from so vile a cause; but yet many of them, who believe in neither heaven nor hell, have resisted every argument.'

'But are you certain, holy father,' asked Frederick, 'that this knight lives in adultery with Neuenberg's widow?'

'That, my lord, I fear admits not of a doubt, for on the very night that the remains of her murdered lord were committed to their mother earth was this strange knight privately admitted to her chamber, and the following morning dismissed with the same secrecy. But in a few days he again appeared at the head of a troop of horsemen, and declared openly that he came to challenge the last will of Count Neuenberg, who, on his death-bed, suspecting that he had been poisoned by his wife, had disinherited her, leaving the sole care and administration of his domains to the Abbot of our holy order, and bequeathing to our monastery the revenues till his daughter should become of age. These this new defender of the widow openly opposed, and drove the ambassadors sent from our convent away in scorn.'

'But what proofs are there that Neuenberg fell by the hand of his wife?' asked Frederick.

'Two different witnesses confessed it on their death-bed. The physician and myself were present when their depositions were committed to writing, and signed by their dying hands. Here is the parchment—read and convince yourself—the wretches, you will see, had been employed by the Countess as her accomplices to procure the poison; but afterwards, fearing they might betray her, she had administered the same to them.'

'Well,' said the young knight, 'I am now sufficiently instructed. What do you think will be the most favourable time to attack the fortress?'

'The hour of midnight, when the physician will admit us by a private door. A few of your troops will be sufficient to overpower the sentinels who will probably be off their guard, while in the meantime the rest may hasten to the apartments of the adulteress, and, if they find her in the arms of her paramour, one sword may pierce the hearts of both, and end your cares.'

Frederick, forgetting himself, cried, 'Damned fiend!——'

'What are you pleased to say, Sir Knight?'

'Nothing, nothing. Go on, sir;' and he whispered to his followers, 'Do not let this monk quit your sight for one minute.'

'My lord,' continued the chaplain, 'I have also a petition to present to you from our holy abbot, that as, in case of the death of the Count Neuenberg's daughter, a death which he is ready to prove, the whole of the property devolves to our convent, therefore he humbly begs that nothing may be plundered or destroyed, and that you may not set fire to the fortress which is now the property of the Church.'

Frederick in a tone of anger answered: 'What does your abbot take us for, robbers or incendiaries?'

'Heaven forbid!' said the priest meekly, 'God and His holy saints keep us from such a suspicion. Forgive me then, good Sir Knight, and let me offer one other prayer from our holy father, which is that, after you have taken possession of the fortress, you may deliver it into the hands of the abbot with all the usual solemnities, in presence of the vassals convened, as this will be the means of preventing all future feuds, and he in return will most thankfully pay all expenses incident upon this campaign, besides rewarding each individual knight in the most ample manner.' He ceased.

'Sir Monk, know that we come to protect innocence, and to punish vice and hypocrisy. Tell your abbot this, and tell him more, that as no bribe could induce us to do wrong, so will we accept of no rewards for doing our duty.'

Frederick now gave the monk in charge to his followers, while he ruminated in silence on the strange tale that he had just heard, and although, from various things which had fallen from the monk in the course of his narration, he almost acquitted the widow in his own mind, he resolved to get possession of the fortress, and investigate this dark deed of blood to the bottom.

At midnight the whole party mounted their horses, and under the guidance of the monk rode on till they reached a small path secretly cut through the rocks, where, leaving their horses with some of their squires, they began to ascend on foot. The night was uncommonly dark, and, as they advanced

in profound silence, no ray of light proceeded from the fortress, nor was the most distant sound to be heard. All seemed to be buried in profound sleep, and to promise an easy conquest.

But on reaching the private gate, the chaplain, to his infinite surprise, found it shut, and, although he repeatedly knocked and called to the physician within, no one answered. At length they could distinguish a footstep on the parapet wall, and a voice cried: 'Is this the tread of the Lion?'

Frederick answered at once: 'It is, and, if you know him, you must also know that he comes to punish guilt alone, and to take the cause of innocence under his protection.'

The voice replied: 'I know him well, and for this is he doubly welcome, but it becomes not the noble spirit of the Lion thus to prowl in darkness and in secrecy. Leave that to hirelings and to monks, but let his actions be open as the day. Descend, then, once again, and approach by the great gate which shall be thrown open for the Lion, whose judgment we await without fearing.'

The young leader answered: 'At the great gate of the Castle, then, we shall meet anon. Noble fellows in arms, his proposal breathes the very essence of honour; then let us descend.'

Then continued the voice: 'Yet one request more: Be watchful of the Tiger if he be with you, and let him not escape.'

On their way round to the front of the fortress the priest assured Frederick that the whole was a scheme to betray him, as he had recognised the voice of the stranger knight, and feared their plot had been discovered, and the physician would be a prisoner, if not murdered. But when he found that all his arguments proved of no avail, and that Frederick was determined to advance, he then petitioned to be released, as he feared the physician might have been induced, by the fear of torture, to make some false confession which might implicate him, although innocent as the child unborn. 'That, Sir Monk, we shall ascertain immediately,' answered Frederick; 'but in the meantime guard him well as you shall answer for it with your lives.'

On reaching the principal entrance of the fortress, they found the drawbridge lowered and Weisenborn, for it was he whose voice had addressed them, with his followers unarmed and bearing torches in their hands ready to receive them.

'Noble son of the Lion,' said Weisenborn, 'I have hitherto defended this fortress and the cause of innocence against the machinations of hypocrisy clothed in the holy garb of religion. My duty now is at an end and I willingly resign both to your honour and generosity.'

'Your confidence, Count Weisenborn, honours alike myself and the order to which I belong. Guard the gates and every avenue leading to the fortress and let no one enter or depart. And now, sir, in reward for your open and generous conduct let me tell you that through me the lovely Bertha greets you.'

'Noble stranger,' replied Count Weisenborn, 'accept my heartfelt thanks for this pleasing and unexpected happiness; then make me still further your debtor by informing me to whom I owe this joyful news.'

'My name is Frederick, Count of Frohburg, and since eight days a member of the order of the Lion.'

'And already adorned,' broke in Weisenborn, 'with all its honours—if in such a man the unhappy lady of this Castle finds a protector, she is fortunate indeed. But I forgot that she is now waiting your approach at the foot of the great staircase in trembling anxiety. Accustomed to behold daily the triumph of hypocrisy and vice, the sense of her innocence has been barely sufficient to support her under her many trials.'

'Then haste, lead me to her,' said Frederick; and Weisenborn having conducted him across the courtyard, a female form clad in long mourning weeds descended the staircase with trembling steps, and as she reached the bottom sank sobbing at the feet of Frederick. It was the widow of Neuenberg, but the hand of sorrow had struck her more sorely than that of time. Her pale cheek and lustreless eye, added to the thinness of her form which was worn almost to a shadow, gave her an appearance of premature old age, and the very first glance proved to Frederick that this was not the face of a wanton.

'Have pity, noble knights!' she cried, 'have pity on a wretched widow! Give me not cause to doubt the justice of the Almighty, or to descend to my grave despairing of His mercy.'

Frederick, as he raised her from the ground, said: 'I tell thee, accursed monk, thou had'st need pray to heaven for mercy, if this be thy doing, and if thou could'st thus torture a woman and mark such tears unmoved. Come, Madam, my heart already acquits thee, but let us retire to your apartments, when I would hear the whole story of your sufferings, not as being necessary to establish your innocence, but that I may learn the villainy of your oppressors, to punish them as they deserve; and do you, my friends, in the meantime guard that hoary hypocrite.'

CHAPTER VIII.

THE Countess now led the way to the banqueting hall, and proffered to Frederick the cup of welcome, but he refused it, saying: 'Pardon me, lady, but when I saw you approaching the very image of heartbroken sorrow, I made an inward vow that not one drop to allay my parched throat should pass these lips until I had redressed your wrongs. Speak then, Madam, for each moment that your vile oppressors live is an insult to justice.'

She said: 'That power would never have been mine but for the generous Weisenborn, for so artfully was their web of malice wove that I must have fallen unpitied by all, but that this noble youth forced one of the criminals to a full confession. Alas! how dreadful is it, to think of what I was—the wife of a noble lord, the mother of five blessed babes, and now a wretched widow without one child to soothe my cares, while even the meanest of my slaves looks on me with horror. Oh God! it is too much to bear. But pardon me, my lord, I'll hasten to my sad tale.

'I was once the happiest of women—and in vain looked round for one whose joys could be compared to mine. I adored my husband with all the fervency of love, and he returned my affection with the fondest indulgence and delicate attentions. Ten years this state of uninterrupted felicity continued, during which heaven blessed our union with four sons and a daughter. It is now five years ago, as we were sitting with our children and fondly watching their innocent sports, the watchman from the Barmhin announced the approach of the Abbot of St. Mary's Convent. He came to persuade my lord to raise his standard and join a crusade then preparing for the Holy Land, and he

had almost obtained his consent, when kneeling at my husband's feet, and holding up our innocent babes, the feelings of a father checked the half-formed vow, and the abbot retired muttering threats of dark revenge. From that unfortunate day do I date the commencement of all my miseries. In the course of one short year I buried my four noble boys; two of them had fallen from the rocks, where they had imprudently climbed, and two were drowned in a torrent. Heaven knows! the stroke was almost too much to bear, and yet to heighten our affliction the unfeeling abbot, instead of seeking to soothe our griefs as is the duty of his holy office, declared that they were merited, and were the visitations of the Almighty sent to chastise the Count for having refused to rear the cross in the plains of Palestine.

'This was more than his already broken frame could bear. From that moment the hand of death was spread over him, though the blow was deferred that it might strike more surely.

'When he felt his last hour approach, he determined to make his will, and, in proof of our love through life, to leave me his sole heir, and for this purpose called in several people, and, among others, the Abbot of St. Mary's, to witness his settlements. This trial was more than my frame, already exhausted with continual watching at his sick-bed, could support, so after administering to him, as usual, one of the draughts he was in the habit of taking, I withdrew myself to my chamber, and, overcome with fatigue, sank to sleep. On awaking from my troubled slumbers, I hastened to my husband's room. Alas! he was no more; and his distorted countenance and livid breast betrayed every symptom of his having died by poison, and in the most dreadful agony. But my grief was almost increased to frenzy when the abbot, with a grin of the most horrid satisfaction, declared that my wretched husband, in the last struggles of expiring nature, had insisted that he died by poison which must have been administered by me. How my already exhausted frame survived this last stroke, I cannot conceive. For some days I lay in a species of torpor, although I suffered at the same time the most acute agony of mind; and when my bewildered senses

at last returned, I was informed that the Count, my husband, without even mentioning my name, had bequeathed the whole of his property to his daughter, appointing the abbot her sole guardian and executor.

'The opinion which I knew my unfortunate Neuenberg had always entertained of the abbot made me now suspect that some infamous treachery had been practised, and I hesitated not to speak my suspicions openly. These the chaplain and physician of the family pretended to agree in, but advised me to proceed cautiously, and to oppose stratagem to fraud. By their advice I sent my daughter to the convent of St. Johanna, to be under the protection of a particular friend among the nuns of that order; but I had cause to repent of having listened to their treacherous advice, as I soon learned that my daughter, as she was walking in the gardens of the convent, had been carried off by banditti.

'My suspicions again rested on the abbot, and the two villains, still pretending to share my fears, advised me to seek for safety in flight, as the abbot, who had been left the sole guardian of my daughter, would now demand her of me, and as she had been sent off without his consent, accuse me of having made away with her. Convinced by their wily arguments, I had determined to seek for temporary safety in a neighbouring cavern, and had actually left the Castle to put this scheme in execution, but on the way stopped to offer up my prayers to the Blessed Virgin in a small chapel which I had been in the habit of frequenting. Here, prostrate in silent adoration, I inwardly prayed for her divine protection through her Blessed Son, when Count Weisenborn, passing, beheld me prostrate at the open shrine, and caught the sounds of my bursting sobs. In hopes of assisting the sufferer, whoever she might be, he quitted his horse, and, in the gentlest manner, inquired into the cause of my sorrow, at the same time offering his assistance if within the reach of human aid.

'My mind, weighed down by continued grief, and at that moment fired with the enthusiasm of my holy employment, made me regard him as a messenger sent down from heaven,

and without hesitating I communicated to him my sad tale. He listened with the deepest attention, and for many causes, which at the moment he would not explain, recommended me immediately to return to the Castle, which I ought never to have quitted, promising me speedy assistance. On leaving me, he hastened to raise such mercenary troops as the urgency of the case would permit, and in five days returned to the fortress at the head of a large force. The two hypocrites, to carry on their plan of deception, still seemed to rejoice at my good fortune in thus unexpectedly meeting with so powerful and generous a protector, and offered themselves as mediators between the abbot and myself. To this proposal we acceded, and they pretended already to have so far succeeded in their office, that the abbot had agreed to restore my lost child, and to secure myself and her in the inheritance of her father, when all at once a large part of the mercenaries deserted from the fortress.

'It was in vain that Weisenborn endeavoured to retain the others by offering them double pay, but the singularity of such a refusal from people of their character for the first time awakened his suspicions, and he learned from some of those who had continued faithful to his interest that our two pretended friends had been long secretly tampering with his followers, and at length gained them over by accusing me and my generous protector of the most horrid crimes.

'His suspicions once aroused, he now watched their every look, and this very night caught the physician skulking within the private postern, which he had already opened. Cowardice, the constant concomitant of guilt, made the trembling wretch confess, but, noble stranger, I could wish that you should hear from his own lips the particulars of it, which, I trust, will more fully prove my innocence.'

The physician, loaded with irons, was now, by the orders of Weisenborn, brought in, when, falling on his knees, he, in the most abject manner, implored for pardon, in reward for the unreserved confession he was now willing to make. He then acknowledged that St. Mary's Convent had long cast an eye of envy on the rich domains of Neuenberg, and that the

present abbot had been raised to that dignity solely on condition of his using every possible exertion towards that wished-for end. In pursuance of these promises, he had endeavoured to inveigle the late Count into joining the Holy Wars, from whence he trusted he might never return, but, failing in his expectations, he now resolved on attempting more diabolical and certain means. For this purpose he introduced into the Castle, as confessor, a creature of his own, possessing a mind capable of planning and executing every scheme, however infamous.

This monster it was who had precipitated two of the Count's sons from a precipice and plunged the two others into the torrent, but so artfully had he managed in both cases, and such unfeigned sorrow had he seemed to express for this awful family calamity that not the slightest suspicion had fallen upon him, and on the contrary he had only endeared himself more to the unfortunate parents. Thus far had their diabolical schemes succeeded to their utmost wishes, but as the Countess might still naturally expect to have other children it was thought necessary to undermine the health of the unfortunate Count, and carry him off by slow poison. To effect this they fixed their eyes upon the prisoner, who by repeated misfortunes had been reduced to the most abject state of poverty, and having trained him to their purpose by the promise of immense rewards, he was introduced into the Castle and ordered to administer a medicine which should undermine the constitution and ultimately produce death.

The Count's determination to execute a deed of settlement in favour of his wife and daughter had nearly rendered abortive all their designs. It became therefore necessary to expedite matters, and accordingly an active poison was infused into the draught which his wife presented to him, while at the same time a powerful narcotic had been previously given to herself which began to operate the moment she quitted his apartment. The Count soon after began to experience the most excruciating tortures, which this wretch declared must be occasioned by some subtle poison administered by the Countess, adding, as if with the utmost

compunction, that she had of late frequently petitioned him for poison under some vague pretence or other, and that that very morning he had missed the drug from the laboratory. These insinuations were confirmed by the abbot's declaring that the Countess immediately on leaving his apartment had fled from the fortress apparently in the utmost confusion.

Overcome by these accumulated testimonies of his wife's guilt, the solicitations of the abbot, and his own increasing tortures, the wretched man subscribed a deed of settlement which had been previously prepared. The Countess being thus cut off from the possibility of ever succeeding, and her character at the same time rendered infamous, it only remained to secure the person of the daughter, the sole obstacle between them and their desired object. For this purpose, as already mentioned, the two fiends had persuaded the mother to send her to a convent from whence the abbot had carried her off, at the same time reporting that the Countess, after poisoning her husband, had made away with her daughter. Had she herself not fortunately followed the advice of Weisenborn and returned to the Castle, which by their persuasions she had been induced to quit, the abbot would now have gotten possession of the fortress without opposition, but, disappointed in his expectations, he had been obliged to work in secret, and by undermining the character of the widow and her protector endeavoured to obtain the assistance of the avenging Lion.

The indignation of Frederick was roused to the utmost by the disclosure of this dreadful scene of iniquity, and when the trembling monk was dragged into his presence, with a voice that appalled his guilty soul, he thus addressed him:

'Unworthy servant of the Lord! the measure of thy iniquity is now full, and dreadful retribution awaits thee; but thou mayest yet mitigate thy sentence by an open avowal. Speak then, but speak sincerely. Where is Count Neuenberg's daughter? Does she still live or has thy blood-thirsty avarice also reached her?'

'Noble knight, have mercy on me! What would you have me confess, or of what can I be guilty?'

'Wretch! darest thou yet ask that? Hast thou not fed on human blood? And hast thou not drugged thy cup, even till it overflowed, with the tears of the widow and the orphan? Execrable monster, hast thou not trampled on every social tie till thou art become a loathsomeness to nature, the very outcast of society? But torture shall force from thee the hellish truth. Fiend! monster! Confess, where is Neuenberg's daughter?'

'Oh mercy, my lord! I am innocent, I know nothing.'

'Doctor, repeat your confession, and strike this villain dumb,' ordered Frederick.

'Oh pardon, noble knight,' shrieked the kneeling wretch, 'and I will confess everything; but I was seduced by the abbot, to whom I owed implicit obedience.'

'I wish to hear no excuses,' was the stern reply, 'only a bare confession of facts.'

The chaplain whined and cried and sobbed out: 'Count Neuenberg's daughter still lives, and the abbot keeps her immured in a dark cell below the chapel of our convent, and it was but yesterday he owned to me that his heart recoiled from the thoughts of murdering so fair a creature.'

'May lightnings blast the hoary brute, but I will cool the holy hypocrite's intemperate blood!' cried the infuriated Frederick. 'Nay, shrink not, lady, your daughter shall yet be restored to you. Sir Monk, sit down and write to this execrable villain as I shall dictate to you. I know not the monster's titles, put them down yourself.'

The chaplain wrote as he was desired: 'God's blessing wait upon thee, venerable abbot and brother.'

'Let us see,' said Frederick. '"Hypocrite, who beginnest every bad action by profaning the sacred name of God;" but I will try to imitate thy canting style. Proceed, sir! "The Lord hath heard our prayer. The Knights of the Lion have come and stormed our fortress.

'"The widow and the stranger lie weltering in their blood, and our noble defenders burn with impatience to deliver over the fortress with all its domains and appurtenances into thy holy hands. Come, then, and reap the rich harvest of all thy

labours. They are impatient to be gone, and cannot long tarry. At the ninth hour, then, to-morrow do we expect thee, that in their presence thou mayest receive the homage of thy vassals." Now, sir, sign your name, but know, if by any private cipher or mark, you have warned the abbot, or if he be not here at the hour mentioned, the next shall see you food for the fowls of the air.'

'Noble sir, fear not. Thirst of revenge will make me true, and as the abbot was my first corrupter, so shall he fall with me.'

Frederick in disgust said: 'Now affix your seal to this. Guards, look to your prisoner. To-morrow, if it so please God, we meet again.'

While the two prisoners were conducted to the apartment appointed for them, one of the knights was dispatched with the letter for the abbot, and the Countess, again sinking upon her knees, poured out the effusions of her grateful heart. At a late hour they separated, and Frederick retired to his couch; but not to sleep, as his mind was still too much occupied with the events of the past day, and the thoughts of all he had to do on the morrow. At the first dawn of light he descended to the courtyard to see that his orders had been punctually executed, and to watch the approach of the abbot, as every hour appeared an age to his impatient mind.

The sentinel from the watch-tower at length announced the arrival of several horsemen, when Frederick gave orders for the prisoners to be immediately brought in chains to a lime tree which grew in the courtyard, and that the drawbridge should be raised the moment that the abbot and his followers should enter. Having given those necessary orders he waited their approach with his arms crossed upon his breast. But his heart throbbed with violence, and his knees shook under him, when he beheld the wretch approach with a sanctified smile and outstretched arms, saying: 'My blessing on thee, thou avenger of the wicked! Come to my bosom, my beloved son, in whose actions the Lord is well pleased.'

Frederick, instead of advancing towards the abbot, pushed

him back, saying: 'Before, sir, I can make over this fortress to you, I must call upon you for the dispensation of one of your sacred duties.

'Here are two culprits ripe for death, ripe for eternal tortures, but God forbid that I should send even such wretches into the presence of their Maker totally unprepared, and therefore I wish to try if by your holy assistance they can make any atonement in this world, before they are precipitated into the next.

'Hear, then, their confession and absolve them if you can. Then must I fulfil my duty as an upright judge, for on that tree must they both be hanged.'

The abbot in astonishment turned his eyes towards the prisoners, and shuddered when he recognised them.

'Ah,' continued Frederick, 'dost thou tremble, fiend? If thou hast seduced them, if thy tongue first paved the road to sin, and if thy gold first led them on to murder, then try to comfort them; speak peace to their souls, and smooth their way to the presence of their injured Maker. Look on them well, mark that look, see despair sits triumphant on their blanched cheek. Then woe to thee, accursed fiend, if thou canst not speak comfort to their dying souls!'

Then addressing the attendants: 'Drag him to the prisoners, and leave him there. Though they have shown no mercy towards others, but hurried them to death with all their sins upon their heads, yet will I grant them one whole hour to make their peace with heaven, but, by the Eternal Father, the next shall see them writhing in the blast.'

The attendants having obeyed his command, Frederick left the courtyard. It was in vain that the widow herself now begged for mercy on the culprits, and that he would delay the dreadful sentence. He remained inflexible, saying that such crimes as theirs demanded the most exemplary punishment, and that his oath and duty alike forbade him to listen to her generous petition.

As soon as the limited time was elapsed, Frederick returned to the court of the Castle, and wondered to behold the criminals looking around them with the utmost audacity and

seeming to defy his power. They who when he last left them were ready to cringe to every mean submission, and the very image of despair, now appeared brazen and hopeful.

He looked on them in silence for some time, and then addressing the abbot said: 'Your last hour is arrived, but yet I would ask you one question: Where is Count Neuenberg's daughter?' To which the abbot, with a look of the most fiend-like exultation, answered:

'Fool that thou art, and dost thou think to wheedle me to thy ends. Know she is hid where no mortal eye can find her. Concealed where none but we can find the clue. Her life, then, can only be purchased by ours, and if thou darest to lift thy impious hand on us, let the mother know that thou hast killed her daughter, that tortured by the horrid pangs of hunger, far from all human help, in the last frenzy of despair, her latest groan shall curse thee to her Maker. But grant our life, and I will yield her up safe and unharmed, and will moreover solemnly resign all claims to the domains of Neuenberg for ever.'

Frederick could hardly speak for anger. 'Ha, viper! Think not to escape me thus. Die thou must; thy very breath is poisonous and impregnated with murder. The rack shall force the truth from thee, and even should'st thou seal the secret with thy blood, yet will I drag it from thy accomplice, even should I purchase it with his pardon.'

'Still, I defy thee,' said the abbot; 'we have sworn to live or die together, and woe to him who dares to open his lips!'

Frederick, without answering or seeming to notice what he had said, ordered the physician's chains to be taken off, and that he should be led aside, which the abbot seeing called to him to be firm, and to remember the immense reward he had promised him not to betray their common safety. Frederick now offered the doctor to grant him his life, and should he become truly repentant his liberty and a considerable reward, if he would discover the prison of Neuenberg's daughter; and he, who had not always been the wretch which extreme poverty and the powerful seduction of gold had made him, willingly threw himself on Frederick's mercy, promising

to confess everything, and by a future life of penance to endeavour to make his peace with heaven. He then told that the abbot kept the lovely orphan concealed in a cavern which lay in a forest not far from the convent, and that the aperture leading to it was so artfully concealed that it was impossible for the eye of man to discover it, but that he, having been employed by the abbot to administer medicines to her when she was ill, knew the approach, and would willingly show it; and he added further that, although the abbot had originally intended to murder her, as standing between him and the possession of his wished-for prize, he had been influenced by her beauty, and preserved her for his horrid lust, although he had hitherto refrained from violence to effect his hellish purposes.

This recital added fresh fuel to Frederick's indignation, and, regardless of their screams and prayers for mercy, he made his attendants instantly hang the criminals to one of the branches of the tree, there to remain till his return. Then, taking a hasty leave of the weeping Countess, whom he endeavoured to comfort with the assurance of speedily returning with her daughter, he departed with the physician and one half of the knights, leaving the others to guard the fortress till his return.

They had reached the forest, and the prisoner was actually pointing to the place where languished the daughter of Count Neuenberg, when a startled stag crossed the road close to the doctor's horse, which, flying back and rearing at the same time, threw its inexperienced rider. Frederick flew to his assistance, but to his indescribable horror found that the unfortunate wretch had been killed upon the spot. Torrents of blood flowed from his mouth, and every hope of preserving the only person acquainted with the secret of the cavern was thus lost for ever. It was in vain that Frederick and his attendants searched every nook and cranny of the rock to which the deceased had pointed. Several hours were spent in the vain pursuit, and he now cursed his hasty revenge, and wished that he had spared, or at least delayed the death of the abbot. One only hope still remained that, perhaps, in

spite of the declaration of the monk, some other member of the convent might be acquainted with the mystery, and he resolved immediately to storm the walls and threaten destruction to its whole inhabitants unless they should instantly divulge their knowledge of the secret.

In pursuance of this determination they had actually mounted their horses, when Frederick's keen eye caught a glimpse of a person in the weeds of a hermit, who was skulking behind the rocks, and who turned to fly the moment he observed the horsemen.

'Whither art thou going?' cried Frederick, galloping after him and seizing him by the arm. The trembling hermit answered that he was returning with a basket of food which he daily received from a neighbouring convent. 'Old man,' cried Frederick, who suspected him to be going to the cavern of the forest from the confusion of his manner, 'thou liest; for I know thee to be the jailer of an imprisoned maid to whom thou art carrying the contents of thy basket.'

'Since you know the truth,' said the hermit, 'then I need no longer attempt concealment; but for heaven's sake do me no injury.'

'Oh, my God,' cried Frederick, 'I thank Thee that Thou hast granted my prayer. Old man, I swear by mine honour that no harm whatever shall betide you, but that, on the contrary, you shall be richly rewarded, if you will instantly conduct me to your prisoner.'

'Most willingly, Sir Knight,' said the hermit, 'will I obey you, but for pity's sake put up your sword, the very sight of it alarms me.'

Frederick complied with the request of the old man, and urged him to hasten to the place. On reaching a projecting part of the rock which was entirely covered with ivy and other creeping plants, the hermit began to remove some sods, so artfully joined to the rest of the soil as to leave no trace of their being loose, but on lifting them there appeared a square stone accurately joined and perfectly level with the surface of the surrounding earth. This the hermit began carefully to raise, but Frederick's impatience could ill brook

the old man's feeble efforts, and, tearing up the trap, he rushed into a sloping passage which now presented itself, while his companions followed, shouting with joy. The passage was of considerable length, and at the further end was closed by a strong door, fastened by massive chains. Frederick now looked round for the hermit, but he had fled; luckily, however, the damp of the place had rotted the door, so that it yielded to their efforts, and, falling in, showed them the unfortunate object of their search standing in a remote corner of her vaulted dungeon, which was lit by an iron lamp suspended from the roof. The noise of their shouts had alarmed her, and fearing violence, if not death, she had endeavoured to conceal herself; but Frederick soon quieted her fears by informing her that he came to conduct her to her mother, who had finally triumphed over the malice of her enemies.

At these words, overcome with joy and gratitude, the lovely sufferer sank on her knees, and thanked her deliverer with all the energy of youthful feeling. Frederick raised her from the ground, modestly denying all claims to praise or thanks, and hastened to conduct her from her loathsome dungeon. But when she was led to the mouth of the cavern, her eyes, accustomed for so many months to the feeble light of a lamp, could not endure the brightness of the sun, and she sank down dazzled and almost fainting. Recovering, however, by degrees, she was lifted upon a horse, which had been purposely brought for her, and consigned to the guidance of the youthful Eschenbach, one of Frederick's knights.

At the period when the abbot got the unfortunate Maria (for so was the prisoner called) into his power, she was entering into her eighteenth year, and bloomed like the rose-bud, not yet quite expanded, and moistened with the morning dew, breathing its fragrance on all around, but grief and the unwholesome vapour of her dungeon had blanched the colours of her cheek. Yet it might be doubted if the paleness of her countenance, and the soft languor of her large blue eyes, by rendering her more interesting, had not rather added to than diminished her charms. Such as she was, the heart of her conductor soon owned her power.

'How beautiful, how lovely,' thought he with all that enthusiasm incident to his age and profession, 'is this maid! But how much more so must she be when all traces of sorrow are banished from her countenance, when hope once more tinges her cheek, and pleasure dances in her beaming eye!'

Maria's weakness would often have made her sink from her horse, had not the sinewy arm of Eschenbach supported her, and the half-fainting sufferer would add fresh fuel to the first sparks of love by reclining her head upon his shoulder, while her cheek met his and the palpitations of her heart through her velvet bodice were distinctly felt, unconscious of what she did. But before they reached the Castle, the sparkling eye and half-whispered expressions of pity of her conductor had almost disclosed a secret at which she was perhaps too weak to be offended.

Meanwhile the anxious mother had left the Castle to meet the approach of the knights; her eye eagerly sought and soon recognised her only, her long lost child, who burning with the same desire flung herself from her horse and sank into the outstretched arms of the happy Countess.

Who can describe the feelings of that moment? The knights forming a circle round the mother and daughter stood in profound silence, while a trickling tear rolled down their manly cheek, and proved how sincerely they participated in the scene before them.

Pressed to each other's breasts, both the Countess and her daughter were for some time unable to speak, but the first tumultuous emotions past, the warmth of their gratitude towards their deliverers found vent in words, and they besought them to rest for some time in that Castle which they owed to them alone.

This invitation Frederick and his knights willingly accepted, and as he passed the gate the sight of the criminals' bodies, which yet remained suspended to the tree, reminded him of one duty unperformed, and he immediately ordered his squires to ride in every direction and invite the serfs and vassals of Neuenberg immediately to assemble in the Castle.

He then followed to the banqueting hall, nor did he now decline the proffered cup of welcome, or the princely repast which had been prepared for him and his knights. Tears of joy bedewed the cheeks of the Countess as she presented the first cup to Frederick, while Maria filling a second presented it to Eschenbach with a trembling hand. 'This, my noble leader, should have been yours by rights,' said the knight to Frederick, as he kissed the proffered cup, 'but as it has been presented by such a hand, permit me to enjoy the precious gift.' Thus saying he drained it to the bottom so that no drop remained, when, according to the usual custom on such occasions, he reversed it on his nail.

Universal joy now reigned around and pleasure sat on every countenance, when one of the attendants entered to announce to Frederick that his orders had been executed, and that the vassals were assembled in the courtyard below.

He immediately arose and conducted the Countess to the court, desiring the knights to follow. He then, in a distinct and loud voice, laid before the vassals the dark iniquity of the abbot and chaplain against their lawful mistress, and ended by directing the attention of the astonished multitude to the bodies of the two criminals, and swearing that such should be the fate of every man who might dare to molest the Countess and her daughter, or challenge their undoubted claims to the inheritance of Neuenberg.

The vassals seemed to listen with horror to this recital of the iniquity of the monks, and in the first ebullition of their zeal would have flown to set fire to the convent, but Frederick, while he thanked them for this proof of their attachment, would not permit an act of injustice by which the innocent might be implicated in the punishment of the guilty. The vassals then took the oaths of allegiance, and offered of their own accord to furnish a hundred men from their number as a guard to the fortress.

'But,' added he who spoke in the name of the others, 'these times, Sir Knight, are times of danger; plunder and rapine are become the chief objects of every man who carries a sword, and I fear we may not always be able to defend the

ladies from their attacks, unless some knight, whose valour has been approved, will undertake to guard the fortress, and scare these robbers and murderers from its walls. If you are still unmarried,' continued he addressing Frederick, 'surely our young mistress would not refuse to give her hand as a reward to her deliverer, and thus through your powerful arm secure the blessings of peace to her faithful vassals.'

'Your offer,' replied Frederick, 'I regard as the highest honour, and, although my heart and hand are already engaged, I am certain that among my brothers in arms, there is none who would not be ready to accept with gratitude the hand of your lovely mistress, if she could be induced to look upon him with a favourable eye, and thus your proposal, of which I highly approve, be fully accomplished.'

Several voices now interrupted Frederick to beg of the Countess and her lovely daughter to accede to their unanimous wishes. And he turned to the ladies, saying: 'You hear the request of your faithful vassals; and if my opinion might have any weight, I would say their wishes are most just and would second them with all my influence.'

The Countess declared that her own opinion entirely coincided with that of her vassals, as experience had but too cruelly taught her that women were in no wise calculated to govern such a fortress. 'But,' continued she, 'you must address yourself to Maria, as I am resolved never to attempt to force her inclinations.'

Frederick now looked towards the trembling girl, but before he had time to speak, she threw herself into her mother's arms crying: 'Oh, spare, spare me, dearest Madam! How can I decide already?' Frederick felt all the embarrassment of her situation and begged the vassals to retire for the present, and that probably by to-morrow the gentle Maria would have made her choice, and when she again begged for further delay, as she could never bring her mind to decide within that limited time, Frederick added with a playful smile: 'I will venture to promise you will decide long ere then, for I am greatly mistaken, my lovely maid, if the choice will be so very difficult

for you to make, or if in fact it is not already made in your own heart.'

The vassals now withdrew, and the company returned to the banqueting hall, where Eschenbach resumed his place by the blushing Maria. Nor did he quit her side during the whole of the evening, while everyone could easily predict that he was to be the happy man.

Ere Frederick retired to rest he gave orders that the bodies of the abbot and chaplain should be cut down and carried to their convent for interment, desiring at the same time that their crimes should be made known to the whole community, with this addition, that the same fate should certainly await any who might walk in their footsteps.

As Frederick had declared his intention of departing the following morning, Eschenbach and Weisenborn accompanied him to his apartment, when the former announced to him that he had been fortunate enough to gain the consent of Maria in case the Countess should approve of his wishes, and therefore petitioned Frederick to exert his influence in his favour, which he readily agreed to do, and ventured to promise him every success.

As soon as the happy Eschenbach had quitted the apartment, Weisenborn began to plead his passion and to entreat Frederick's interference and good offices with the old commander of the Lion. Frederick, whose heart knew but too well how to feel for the sorrows of love, readily promised his warmest assistance, and even urged Weisenborn to accompany him on the morrow to the Castle of his father, as he was certain that the old commander would relent, in consideration of the very important services which he had performed for the Countess of Neuenberg.

Little persuasion was necessary to induce Weisenborn to agree to this proposal, as his anxious desire of once more beholding Bertha silenced every fear which he might otherwise have felt.

On the following morning Eschenbach was presented to the assembled vassals as their future lord, and their mistress's

choice was received with the loudest acclamations. Soon after the attendants who had been sent with the two bodies returned and reported that the monks had exhibited great symptoms of terror at the awful spectacle, but had promised to take no notice of this act of summary justice, provided their convent was spared.

CHAPTER IX.

NOTHING now remaining to detain Frederick, he prepared for an immediate departure. Eschenbach obtained the Countess's permission to carry Maria with him, and to their nuptials being solemnised in the Castle of Frohburg on the same day that should unite Frederick and Clara.

The widow determined to remain behind, as her mourning, she said, would only serve to cast a gloom over their festivities, but that her fervent prayers should attend and follow her daughter.

Frederick left one of his knights to protect the Countess till the return of Eschenbach and Maria. After many tender farewells the party at last moved on, while the inhabitants of the fortress continued to shout out their blessings, till the turning of the road concealed the travellers from their view.

During the whole of their journey, Frederick's soul was filled with joyful anticipations of the future, and he returned thanks to heaven for the different sensations which he now experienced from those he had felt when he last quitted his father's roof. When he beheld the turrets of the Castle rising above the forest he could no longer restrain his impatience, but clapping spurs to his horse he hurried on before the rest of the party. The clouds of dust raised by the horses had already announced their approach, and as Frederick galloped forward he recognised his venerable father at the head of all the inhabitants of the Castle. In a moment he was in his arms, but the voice of Clara made him turn to clasp her to his breast. The old man beheld their transports with delight, and poured over them his benediction, while the attendants expressed the joy they experienced at the return of their young lord in repeated shouts.

At length Count Frohburg informed Frederick that some guests whom he would be most happy to see watched for him anxiously in the Castle, and without waiting for the other knights, who were yet at a considerable distance, they hastened onwards, and at the great staircase were met by Count Farnsburg, the venerable commander of the Lion, and his lovely daughters. The old man received him with a most cordial embrace, and congratulated him on having so speedily accomplished the object of his mission, the particulars of which he begged him to relate, but Frederick requested he would permit him to delay this narrative till after the arrival of Maria, for whom he was most anxious to obtain the protection of his father and his fair guests.

As they ascended the staircase, Bertha's expressive eyes seemed to ask a thousand questions which modesty forbade her to utter, but Frederick, guessing her wishes, desired her to turn her eyes towards the party who were now approaching. At the first glance she recognised the figure of Weisenborn, and the colour forsook her cheeks, while she stammered out, 'O God! what will my father say?'.

'Fear not, sweet maid,' interrupted Frederick, 'I will answer for everything; I have invited the knight to my father's Castle, and Count Farnsburg cannot surely object to that.'

On reaching the great hall Frederick was surprised not yet to have seen his beloved Adelaide, who had been ever the foremost to hail his return, and, although he trembled to inquire, his anxiety got the better of every other consideration, and he asked of Henry where was Adelaide. No one seemed ready to reply, and he dreaded to repeat the question, till old Frohburg, after a painful struggle, at length answered:

'Frederick, my son, pity your unfortunate parent. On the same day both his children deserted him. You indeed are at length returned in triumph and loaded with honour to gild the evening of my days, but alas! I can learn no tidings of my unfortunate Adelaide. On the melancholy day of your departure, I was sitting on her couch and endeavouring to comfort her, when I was called out to speak with a hermit who desired most anxiously to be admitted to my

presence. He came from the wretched Thierstein, who after I had inflicted that wound which I must ever weep for in tears of blood, had been carried by two of his faithful attendants to the hermit's cell, and now while life was fast ebbing away had requested to see me. I followed the hermit, and on entering his cell beheld my victim stretched on a wretched pallet, and received with his last breath certainty of his innocence, and my own guilty rashness. He shortly after expired in my arms, generously praying for his murderer, and breathing his last farewell to my poor Adelaide. I will not tell you, my son, with what feelings I returned to the Castle, or what was my despair when I learned that Adelaide, having deceived the vigilance of those set to watch over her, had fled, and no one could gain any trace of her. One only son remained to support me amid the accumulated trials and the stings of my own conscience. The messengers, whom I had dispatched in every possible direction in search of my unhappy daughter, returned without being able to afford me any comfort. Each day but brought with it an aggravation of sorrow, when I received a message from my old friend, Count Farnsburg. He appeared to me like a messenger from heaven; he brought tidings of you, my Frederick, and Clara, and to him do I owe that I yet live. He also kindly came himself to administer balm to my wounds, and through him and the kindness of heaven I trust that I may yet press my Adelaide to my aged breast, as we have just learned that a female answering her description was seen to enter the Convent of St. Francis in Hornont. The Count's eldest son has this day left us, accompanied by some of her women, in search of her, and I now feel confident that his pursuit will not be in vain.'

In these wishes Frederick most heartily joined, but forbore to inquire further on a subject which to his father was pregnant with so many agonising recollections.

An attendant now entered to announce the arrival of Maria and the knights, whom Frederick presented to his father and Henry, recommending the former to the protection of Bertha and Agnes.

Count Frohburg received them with every demonstration of respect, but Frederick thought he could perceive a frown of displeasure on the countenance of old Farnsburg when Weisenborn was introduced. He, however, took no notice of it at the time, and the conversation soon became general. In the course of it, Clara whispered to Frederick that she strongly suspected that Henry was by no means insensible to the charms of the arch Agnes, and that she supposed he would ere long propose himself as a candidate for the order of the Lion; but before Frederick had time to reply he was summoned away by old Farnsburg, who required his presence with all the other knights of their order in a separate apartment.

'Ere we begin,' said the old man, addressing Frederick, 'I must speak a few words to you in private;' and, having withdrawn with him into a corner of the room, he expressed in strong terms his displeasure at seeing Weisenborn in their suite. But in answer Frederick earnestly begged not to be condemned till Count Farnsburg should have heard a narration of all that had passed, when he would see that both he and the whole of their order lay under the highest obligations to Weisenborn, by whom alone they had been prevented from embruing their hands in the blood of the innocent, and entailing eternal disgrace upon the name of the Lion. He then gave to the assembled knights a particular account of the manner in which he had executed the duty entrusted to his care. The fullest approbation of Count Farnsburg was his reward, and the venerable knight immediately desired that Weisenborn might be conducted to their presence to receive the well-earned thanks of all for having rescued the order from becoming the instrument of vice. Frederick joyfully flew to execute this command, and soon returned leading his friend.

Count Farnsburg rose to meet them, and embracing Weisenborn begged him to accept the united thanks of all his companions in arms, which he had most deservedly merited. 'Sir Knight,' continued he, 'you have done our order a most essential service. Speak, then, I demand in the name of the whole, and say how we can best show that gratitude we feel.'

'My noble lord,' said Weisenborn, 'I have only done my duty, which ever carries with itself its own reward.'

Count Farnsburg replied: 'We have known each other ere this, gallant knight, but I did not then appreciate as I ought thy valuable qualities. I now gladly acknowledge my error. Speak then without dread; thy wishes, whatever they may be, shall be fulfilled.'

Frederick undertook to answer for his friend, and requested that he might be admitted as a candidate for the honour of becoming a member of their order, and Weisenborn added that he should regard this as a sufficient reward, since, should he be so fortunate as to succeed, he might then entertain other and dearer hopes.

The old commander understood him well, and acceded to his wishes. It was then agreed that they should all return to the Castle of the Lion on the morrow, and that Weisenborn and young Henry, who anxiously longed to become one of their noble order, should begin their probation immediately. Old Farnsburg then turning to Weisenborn added smiling: 'Should'st thou return with only the open helm, my daughter Bertha shall yet greet thee with a kiss of welcome.'

The assembly now broke up, and the knights returned to the great hall to join the inhabitants of the Castle. Bertha's cheeks were suffused with the deepest crimson when she saw her father accompanied by Weisenborn, whom he presented to Count Frohburg as a noble and valiant knight, and one whom he hoped soon to number amongst the sons of the Lion. This unexpected declaration almost overcame the gentle maid, who to conceal her emotions retired to the opposite side of the hall, where Clara was seated, and whispered her thanks to her for having pleaded her cause so well.

The remaining part of the day was dedicated to festivity, and the younger part of the company were unwilling to separate, even when the watchman had proclaimed the midnight hour, and the old knights had reminded them that it was time to retire to rest. Each knight at length took leave of his fair mistress. Eschenbach warmly recommended his Maria to the protection of the ladies. Bertha promised to re-

member Weisenborn in her prayers, and when Henry would have entreated Agnes to think of him in her orisons, she promised to offer a couple of Pater Nosters for him should time hang heavy on her hands.

On the following morning, the crowing of the cock was the signal for departure. Henry while his horse was preparing sought his father's chamber to request his benediction, which the old veteran granted him, and added that he trusted Henry would never forfeit the honours of his name, but would return like his brother loaded with glory, a member of the Lion.

On the fourth day after their departure the knights had reached the confines of an extensive forest as the sun was descending behind the mountains that formed the boundary of Swabia, and, as no proper place to accommodate so large a party was to be found within several leagues, the old commander resolved to halt there for the night, although it was reported to be the haunt of several bands of freebooters who infested the neighbourhood. They accordingly fixed upon an open glade, surrounded by immense oak trees, and leaving their horses to graze seated themselves upon the soft moss, contentedly supping upon such provisions as their squires had carried with them.

Their frugal repast ended, they were about to lay themselves down to rest, when one of the knights announced that no water could be found, and that their fatigued horses refused to taste the dry pasture without it. Farnsburg replied that some source of water must certainly exist within the forest, and immediately ordered that sixteen knights of the first order should divide themselves into four parties; to the east, the west, the north and the south in search of water. Frederick having reported that there were only fourteen knights of the first order present, Henry and Weisenborn instantly volunteered their services, which the old commander accepted of, and, being furnished with bugle-horns in case of losing themselves in the forest, they were dispatched towards the south along with Eschenbach and another knight.

They had scarcely proceeded a mile when they thought they heard the sound of a distant waterfall. Henry listened

for a moment, and then spurred on his horse accompanied by Weisenborn, but ere they had proceeded far the latter, suddenly catching his bridle, pointed to the rock from which the water which they had heard seemed to issue, and at the foot of which, seated round a fire, were a number of armed men. They halted to determine what ought to be done, as they had no doubt but that they must be a party of the banditti who frequented the forest. They could distinctly count ten of them, while at the same time it was probable that there might be many more in the cave at the mouth of which they were sitting. It was, however, determined to advance whatever they might be, as perhaps they were only travellers who had been benighted in the forest, and if they were really banditti, as was more than probable, it would tarnish the fame of the Lion to turn their backs upon them or leave such scourges of society unmolested near his den. Having formed their resolution, they quitted their horses, and fastening them to the stumps of some trees, advanced in the utmost silence through the brushwood which entirely concealed them. With extreme caution they descended the steep bank, and unperceived reached the spot where the fire was kindled, still crouching behind the underwood, and anxious to listen to the conversation of the banditti.

Ten men well armed lay round the fire, while a female seemed busily employed in preparing some meal for them. Her dress, although much soiled, was rich and costly, and formed a strange contrast with her present occupation. Her pale and dejected countenance was singularly beautiful. Her dark hair hung in the utmost disorder over her neck and shoulders, while the tears rolled abundantly down her cheeks, which one of the barbarians observing called out: 'Stop your yelling, for I am tired with listening to your howls, and want rest!' Her tears only seemed to redouble at this unfeeling speech, when the miscreant, rising in a fury, aimed a blow at her head.

Henry instantly sprang forward, crying: 'Let those who may witness such a sight, I cannot!' and Weisenborn and the two other knights, animated with the same feelings, hastened to his assistance. Instantly the banditti cried: 'Fly to your arms!' and prepared to oppose the passage of the

knights, while twenty others rushed from the cave to assist their companions. The knights, impeded in their progress by the underwood, through which they were obliged to carve a way with their swords, now found themselves suddenly attacked in the rear, and, after an ineffectual struggle, Weisenborn and Henry, overpowered by numbers, were dragged to the ground, while Eschenbach and Schnabelburg sank, covered with wounds.

The astonishment of the banditti may be easily conceived, when they at length discovered that they had been thus assaulted by four knights, and only regretted that they had not spared their lives to consign them to bondage.

In attempting to lift the dead bodies from among the brushwood where they had fallen, Eschenbach's sword caught the eye of the leader of the band, who, snatching it up, cried, with exultation, 'Rejoice, brothers! By heavens, our victims are knights of the Lion! And now let us glut our ancient grudge by every species of torture on the two that have luckily survived.' The expiring Eschenbach heard the villain's threat, and raising himself on his elbow with the little strength which yet remained, stammered out: 'Tremble, ye miscreants, and know that there are yet many of our brethren in the forest who will speedily avenge our fall.' These words he uttered in a voice scarcely articulate, and then expired.

The robbers now held a council of war, and determined upon immediately attacking the rest of the knights, who at this hour might most probably be sunk in sleep, but it was first necessary to learn the exact part of the forest in which they were. For this purpose Henry and Weisenborn, who had been bound down with cords, were promised their life and liberty, on condition of guiding the robbers to the place, and, on the contrary, threatened with the most dreadful tortures which their cruelty could invent, should they hesitate. Both of the knights rejected their offers with the utmost contempt, and swore a tremendous oath that the severest tortures should not force a syllable from their expiring lips, and this oath they again repeated when the savage monster had bound them to a tree, and others were advancing with red-hot pinchers, and boiling water to pour into their wounds.

CHAPTER X.

As the dreadful execution was about to commence, the blast of a bugle-horn arrested the uplifted arm of the villain, and the next moment a body of armed men forcing their passage through the wood, accompanied with loud shouts, the banditti fled in all directions, and their delighted captives found themselves surrounded by their friends.

'Hail, noble knights!' said old Farnsburg to them, as some of the others were unbinding them from the trees, 'you have passed this trying ordeal with honour to yourselves, and I now hail ye with rapture as worthy sons of the Lion.'

Astonished at such a declaration, Henry and Weisenborn pointed to the bodies of Eschenbach and his companion, and would have asked an explanation, but the old man, interrupting them, added: 'Learn that the first duty of your new order is silence and implicit obedience. The time may come when many things at present involved in mystery shall be explained to you, but at present you must mount your horses and advance in silence.'

Some of the knights remained behind to take care of the bodies of their murdered companions, and the rest, moving forward, reached the Castle of the Lion the same evening without further interruption.

That very night the two candidates were admitted into the assembly of the knights with the usual ceremonies. Henry was then conducted into the small apartment where his brother had been formerly confined. Like him, he was precipitated into the cavern, and passed through nearly the same trials as his brother, with only such alterations and

modifications as the circumstances of his situation required, as it was not probable that he should feel the same distrust of the knights as Frederick, who had had every reason to regard them as a horde of robbers. He behaved with equal valour, but not being equally successful as his brother, he only re-entered the great hall as a knight of the second rank. He therefore received the helm and sword, but only two plumes, while he was denied the collar of the order.

Weisenborn was still less successful, and, having feared to venture across the torrent, was only admitted as a brother of the third order. The astonishment and joy of the new members may be easily conceived when, in the first of those who advanced to congratulate them on their success, they recognised Eschenbach and Schnabelburg, whom they thought they had seen expire covered with wounds but a few hours before. Eschenbach observed their astonishment, and said, smiling:

'It was my duty to deceive, and your present astonishment shows me that I have been a good actor, and that my groans and the red liquor which seemed to flow from my wounds have completely deceived; but, while they deceived, I am happy to know that they only roused your natural courage, otherwise should I not now have the pleasure of embracing you as a brother of our order.'

At noon they all repaired to the banqueting hall, where Henry and Weisenborn were made completely happy when the old commander announced his intention of returning to the Castle of Frohburg on the following day, and, after pledging them as new sons of the Lion, permitted them to push their suits with Bertha and Agnes, promising his blessing and consent should his daughters accede to their wishes.

Universal joy spread through the Castle of Frohburg when the banners of the Lion were seen advancing up the hill after an absence of nine days. Nor was the gentle Adelaide the least delighted of the happy party who rushed out to meet them.

Count Farnsburg's son had reached the convent in time to prevent her from taking the irrevocable vow, and restored

her to the arms of her unhappy parent. The traces of grief were yet distinguishable on her pallid cheeks, but the hand of time had blunted the keenness of her grief, and in the arms of her beloved brothers it was for a time forgotten. But hers were not the only eyes that were moistened by the tear of gladness. Clara, too, shared the embraces of Frederick, and while the anxious eye of Bertha wandered in search of Weisenborn, Agnes, who pretended that curiosity alone had guided her steps, followed every motion of the young Henry, while she beheld with delight the sword and plume that spoke him a son of the Lion; but, unable to restrain the natural playfulness of her disposition, she was about to ask him if he had dropped the collar by the way, when the look of love and hope that shone on his countenance as he advanced to salute her, disarmed her malice, and the satirical smile vanished from her pouting lips, as she stretched out her hand to salute him.

But when Henry would have told her that he had her father's consent to hope, and asked her to confirm these hopes, she flew from him to join the rest of the party, nor could he for the remainder of the day find an opportunity of speaking to her in private. In the evening, however, while all the others of the party were engaged in a distant part of the hall she passed behind the chair in which he was seated buried in thought; and, tapping him on the shoulder, whispered: 'I would see you presently in the garden on business that naturally concerns the happiness of both,' and without waiting for his reply glided out of the room. The delighted Henry hastened to the appointed spot, and found her seated on the grass.

'Sir Knight,' said Agnes, as he seated himself by her, 'I have a secret to communicate to you, and on your answer must depend the future happiness or misery of my life. I have discovered that our fathers have been plotting against us, and it becomes the duty of both to endeavour to counteract their plans. On your assistance then I reckon; but before I discover my secret to you, you must swear to fulfil my request whatever it may be.'

'O lovely enchantress!' he said, 'you can mould me to

your will, and your wishes to me must ever be laws, but in this case the plots of our fathers are but to promote our happiness, and would you wish me to join against that?'

'Before I answer you,' Agnes said, 'say, could you be contented to possess my hand without my heart?'

'Heaven forbid!' said Henry, 'but, cruel that thou art, why wilt thou make the supposition?'

She rose. 'I have done; I need not your assistance, Sir Knight, and feel that I can act without your aid.'

'No; remain, cruel maid, for even should you be the author of my misery, I find I cannot hate. I can deny you nothing. I swear then to grant your request.'

'Give me,' said Agnes, 'your knightly hand upon it—well—now take my everlasting thanks and listen: this day I overheard our fathers settling that at the ensuing banquet they should propose a cup to the health of the affianced lovers, and that when the names of Frederick and Clara, of Bertha and Weisenborn, and of Maria and Eschenbach should be repeated, my father should object, because the rules of his order require the number four, and presenting the cup to you, desire you to name the object of your choice which you must ere then have made; and that they would lend their aid to crown your wishes. Now, I fear that they expect you should name me, and so shall I be tormented with their importunities.'

'Tormented!' he cried. 'Oh say not so, lovely Agnes! Let me hope that you will not pronounce a doom of endless misery on one who adores you.'

'Henry, remember your oath, and listen to me—and if you know so well what the feelings of a lover are, listen and pity me and then shall I not repent the confidence I have placed in you. Know then that I love and love too without hope. The dreadful truth is at last out. Then pity me, for in you alone now rest all that is left of hope.'

'O God! this is too much. Well, cruel maid, what do you expect of me?'

In a low voice she said: 'That you should fulfil your oath.'

'Well then be it so,' he said. 'The fatal die is cast, and if one of us must perish I would rather die myself a hundred times than behold you who are so dear to me suffer. I forgive the cruel artifice by which you have enticed me to my ruin. But you might have confided in my honour, for sooner would I have suffered every misery this world can produce than I would have accepted of your hand, while I had reason to believe another blessed with your affections.'

'Noble youth, then I was not mistaken in you. Let this kiss of sacred friendship speak my thanks.'

'O God, forbear!' he said, 'you know not what you do. In pity to us both forbear. There's poison on those lips. Speak then, quick, ere I relapse, and send back my oath to the demon of ill who forced it from me. Speak, who is the hated object of your love?'

'Count Schnabelburg!' she replied.

He spoke excitedly: 'Schnabelburg! Nay, now I see you have been but striving to torment me. Schnabelburg, impossible! A man cast in nature's vilest mould! A man worn down more by deformity even than age, the very scum and mockery of knighthood! Nay, gentle Agnes, own that you have been trifling with me. Heaven knows you have made me suffer sufficiently already.'

'Alas!' she said, 'I speak but too truly, and it is in vain that you would seek to drive him from my heart. To a soul like mine the errors of his form are naught. I adore the beauty of his mind, and live upon his noble virtues, and even his poverty, which makes him a dependant on my father's bounty, has but increased his power over me.'

'Great God!' he exclaimed, 'and do you think Count Farnsburg can ever consent to so preposterous an alliance? Impossible!'

She said: 'That has hitherto sealed up my lips, and made me pine in silence, but now through your assistance will every difficulty, I trust, be overcome, and my tears dried for ever. Hear, then, what I have to propose. When at the banquet my father shall present the cup to you, plead diffidence and doubts of your success, and, proffering the bowl to me, request

that I may drink to the health of the knight who is most dear to me.'

'Impossible!' he said, 'this is a refinement upon cruelty to force me to be my own executioner. No, cruel girl, it is beyond my power. You ask more than I am fit for.'

'O Henry, my dear, my generous Henry, be merciful!'

'Haste then,' he said, 'and speak what yet remains. Oh, that voice, that look, might lead on to the perpetration of crimes yet unheard of.'

'Mark me,' she continued, 'I will accept the proffered cup, but ere I put it to my lips will exact my father's knightly word that he shall approve my choice whatever it may be, and as I have ever pretended in his presence to favour your addresses I have no doubts of his granting my request. Then will I openly pledge the health of Schnabelburg, and boldly speak my honest passion.'

'Ungenerous Agnes, this is beyond the power of man. No oath can bind me at once to make myself wretched, and at the same time the laughing stock of a whole assembly—a mark, a butt for the finger of scorn to point at. I tell you it is impossible, and thus I fling my rash vow to the winds.'

'Remember, Henry, you have bound yourself by all that men hold most sacred. Then tremble at a frantic woman's rage, for, by heavens, I will denounce you to the assembly—nay, in the face of the whole world, as a recreant and perjured knight.'

It was in vain that Henry urged every argument to turn her from her unreasonable proposal; she left him with a look of the sternest indignation, without deigning to listen to his prayers or marking the raving of his despair.

When alone, Henry's mind became a prey to a thousand tortures, and it was in vain that he thought within himself how he might cancel the hated oath, which bound him down to misery, but alas! the barb had struck too deep, the fatal vow had been registered in heaven, and he found that he yet loved her too well not to prefer her happiness to every selfish consideration. He therefore determined to drink the bitter

cup even to the dregs, and at last to merit her gratitude if he must for ever abandon all hope of a tenderer nature.

But still unable to support the gaze of the world or to mingle in society, he continued in the garden until the sound of the trumpet, summoning the inhabitants of the Castle to the hall, forced him to enter.

To add to his distress he found that a place had been purposely reserved for him by the side of Agnes. For some time he sat by her without venturing to raise his eyes or to join in conversation. At length, however, he could not help observing to her that Schnabelburg seemed more intent upon the business of the table than the thoughts of his bliss, nor appeared in any wise to share her tenderness or anxiety. 'That,' replied Agnes, 'is owing to his being as yet ignorant of my designs; but mark his delight and astonishment when I shall begin.'

'Begin then quickly, in pity's sake,' replied Henry, 'that my torments may end, for I must confess my present seat is strewed with thorns.'

'You grow rude, Sir Knight,' said Agnes, pouting; but all further conversation was prevented, Count Farnsburg having at that moment called for the large golden cup. Henry turned pale at the sound, and fixing his eyes on the table remained in a state of the most cruel agony, and scarcely sensible of what was passing around.

At length the dreaded moment arrived, the cup was presented to him. With a trembling hand he seized it and instantly transferred it to Agnes muttering to her in a voice hardly articulate to drink to the health of him that was most dear to her. Agnes accepted the cup and declared that she would willingly comply with Henry's proposal were she certain that the object of her affections would meet with the approbation of those whom she was bound to obey.

'But sir,' continued she addressing her father, 'are my thoughts sufficiently known to you, and do you think yourself so thoroughly acquainted with the secrets of my wayward heart, as to authorise me thus to lay them open before this

noble company, and if so will you pledge your word to sanction with your consent whomsoever I may name?'

The manner in which this was spoken, and the playfulness of the tone in which it was delivered, were irresistible, and everyone, save the unhappy Henry, joined in beseeching her father to grant her wishes, and even Count Frohburg declared that his son deserved to be punished if he had been too presumptuous in his hopes.

Thus importuned, old Farnsburg pledged his knightly word to sanction her choice, whoever it might be. Agnes now rose, and while an evident joy, replete with some secret meaning, played on her countenance, thus spoke:

'I am satisfied, my noble lord! Few women have, like me, been granted the envied happiness of finding their wishes uncontrolled. Accept, then, my heart-felt gratitude for this singular favour. My choice has been long made, and as it has fallen on the best and worthiest of men, I will no longer conceal his name.' Then, putting the goblet to her lips, she exclaimed: 'Long live the chosen of my heart, long live my future joy, my future lord, Henry, Count of Frohburg!'

Her last words were echoed by the whole party, and all hastened to congratulate Henry, who sat bewildered, unable to comprehend or credit his own happiness, and almost doubting the evidence of his senses. His eyes still remained fixed upon the ground, and his chair had been drawn back as ready to escape the mockery he had expected on Agnes' declaration, nor did he attempt to speak, till the voice so dear to his heart by its magic sounds recalled him to a sense of his unexpected happiness. Then sinking at her feet he cried, 'Thanks, eternal thanks, dear and cruel maid. You have nearly given me my death blow; but this blessed moment, by speaking peace and happiness to my lacerated bosom, has more than repaid an age of misery.'

The company were astonished at these strange incoherent expressions of Henry, and old Farnsburg insisted on an explanation, which Agnes readily agreed to give. She then related all the scheme of deception she had practised on Henry, and in conclusion added: 'Nay, blame not poor Agnes,

dearest father, you yourself, before yo[redacted] a member of your order, require that [redacted] many trials, to ascertain if he is fit or [redacted] Now to us poor women matrimony is a[redacted] interest, and one which requires at least a[redacted] the choice of its members. I was therefo[redacted] try the honour, the generosity, the sense of lo[redacted] candidate, ere I would admit him to a particip[redacted] holy rites.'

Old Farnsburg could only reproach the little orato[redacted] smile, while Henry declared that the present embrace mo[redacted] than repaid him for all he had suffered.

Schnabelburg however observed that, as he had been made the monkey of the plot, he must insist upon a kiss in recompense of his disappointment, and her having taken his name in vain. Agnes, smiling to Henry as if to ask his permission, presented her cheek, while he exclaimed: 'Now do I for the first time feel the full extent of the misery I should have suffered had you spoken truth.'

During the rest of the evening the cup circulated among the happy party, and in the course of it it was settled that the nuptials of all should be celebrated with the utmost magnificence in the Castle of Frohburg, and that after eight days spent in revelry the whole party should remove to the Castle of the Lion, and there devote a similar period to rejoicing.

Young Count Lewis of Farnsburg, who had rescued Adelaide from the convent, thought this a lucky period to push his suit, but though she owned herself not insensible to his merits, and did not forbid him to cherish future hopes, she declared that her mind was yet too much filled with the cruel recollection of her betrothed Thierstein to admit the addresses of any other. With this Count Lewis was forced to remain satisfied, but still continued his suit with unremitting though respectful ardour.

On the eve of that day which was to give happiness to so many lovers, a numerous train of knights and ladies who had been invited to share in the nuptial festivities arrived at the

ned animated by the anticipation of
it was not until repeatedly reminded
teness of the hour that the party could
e. Ere midnight, however, all were sunk
the lovers enjoyed the sweets of repose,
o dreams of bliss.

CHAPTER XI.

FREDERICK alone could not sleep; a kind of dark presage of the future for which he could in no wise account weighed him down. Tired and feverish with the ineffectual attempts to compose himself to rest, he quitted his uneasy couch, and flinging open the casement sought refreshment in the night breeze. As he gazed upon the shadows of the clouds that rapidly crossed the moon, he suddenly observed the tops of the trees as they bent before the gale tinged with a lurid light. The glare became every moment stronger, and he could at length plainly distinguish the red blaze of numerous torches, which seemed to ascend the rising ground on which the fortress stood. They approached rapidly, and he could now plainly observe that the lights were borne by knights clad in black armour and mounted on sable steeds. As they galloped up the hill their torches flared in the breeze, and gleaming on their dark helms gave them the appearance of messengers from hell.

They checked their horses opposite the great gate of the Castle, which was closed, and gave Frederick an opportunity of examining them more closely. The vizors of their helms were closed, and over each of them nodded a grove of dark plumes. Their shields were covered with black crape, and one of them bore a sable pennon on which by the glare of the torches Frederick could perceive three death's heads embroidered in silver. One of these strange knights dismounted from his horse and nailed on the right-leaf of the gate a written parchment, then drawing forth a long bent trumpet from which was suspended a black banner, he gave three loud blasts, whose horrid notes were reverberated upon

the stillness of the night by the surrounding rocks. The astonished watchman started from his post, and in a trembling voice inquired their names and the object of their visit.

'Wake thy lord,' said one of them, 'immediately, and tell him we would speak to him in the name of the Omniscient and Almighty God!'

Frederick now bending from the casement cried: 'I am the son of the Lord of this Castle; speak then, what do you require?'

To which the stranger replied: 'Wait but a little while, thy turn will come anon.'

At this moment old Frohburg, roused by the sound of the infernal trumpet, appeared at another casement and demanded the cause of this unseasonable visit.

'Count Frohburg,' answered one of the sable knights, 'we bring to thee and to thy children, to thy friends and to thy inmates, the curse of thy offended God! To His servants upon earth He has devolved His power to bind or to set free. That sacred office they now fulfil, that awful duty they now perform, and drive thee from the bosom of our holy Church. They have put thee to the ban, and we are delegated to carry thee the tidings. Accursed then is he who shall in future hold communication with thee; accursed be he who listens to thy voice, or heeds thy commands, and twice accursed be he who administers a morsel to thy pinching want, or a drop of water to cool thy parched tongue. Eternally accursed be the priest who shall allow thy unhallowed step to profane the house of God, or speak His holy word to thy polluted ears; and may the eternal curses of the Almighty God rest upon him who would speak peace to thy dying soul.'

As the dreadful imprecation closed, all the sable knights repeated an 'Amen' three times. But old Frohburg, in no wise intimidated by the dreadful anathema, screamed out in a voice almost choked with fury: 'Accursed be ye who thus profane the name of God! What crime have I committed to deserve the ban and curse of the Church?'

The leader of the Black Knights replied: 'Ha! darest thou ask? Thy son, accursed with thee, has laid his impious

hands upon the Lord's anointed and foully murdered him, and you, the sharer and abettor of his horrid crime, have supported him in his guilt. But three times woe to thee, and three times to the Lion under whose banner the deed of darkness was accomplished!'

'What!' said Count Frohburg. 'What! was not the abbot a murderer, a villain? Speak, did he not merit death a hundred fold? So this is the cause of the curse. Then tell your employers that old Frohburg exults in a ban which separates him from the society of such miscreants; but say, who is it that has dared to pronounce it against me?'

The Black Knight answered: 'Conrad, Bishop of Constance, under whose jurisdiction your dominions lay; and, know, it has been already announced in every church and place of worship. Then, sinner, dare not to approach their holy threshold. Thou art now without the protection of the law, and he who murders thee will merit his Redeemer's thanks.'

Count Farnsburg, who had hitherto listened in silence, now waving his sword in defiance, thus addressed the person who seemed to be the leader of the Black Knights: 'Go carry to your bishop the greetings of old Farnsburg, commander of the order of the Lion, and tell the haughty prelate that in the name of that noble order he is advised speedily to recall his ban, and convert it into his best blessing, unless he longs to see the walls of his palace crumble about his ears.'

The Black Knight shouted back: 'Retire to your bed, old man, the night air will chill your thin blood. Our bishop laughs your threats to scorn, and ere the old eagle reaches his eyrie he may probably find the nest empty, for on you and all your order has the same ban been pronounced, and at this moment it is affixed to the gates of your Castle.'

'Ah, say you so?' said Farnsburg; 'then tarry a moment and I will give you a message to carry to your bishop which may make, probably, both you and him remember your visit to the Lion's den.'

'Old man,' said the sable leader, 'our commission is finished. Ere long we may see you again, but now business calls, and we cannot wait an old man's tottering steps.'

Thus saying he sprang into his saddle and galloped down a hill attended by all the mysterious knights, while shouts of laughter followed them from all the casements where the inhabitants of the Castle were by this time assembled. Soon after they all returned to their rest, resolved that the empty threats of the angry bishop, though backed by his dark protectors, should not prevent the happiness of the following day.

The first rays of the sun had scarcely gilded the tops of the mountain, when all the inmates of the Castle were in motion; but, although Farnsburg and his knights held the ban in sovereign contempt, the case was far different with many. The power of the Church had been too often felt not to make many shrink from its fury, and most of the guests who had been invited to partake of the festivities slunk away in silence without taking leave, and even many of the ancient servants and retainers of the family approached their lord with faltering steps begging to be dismissed, as their eternal salvation required that they should no longer continue in his service.

Count Frohburg felt shocked at seeing the immediate effect which the ban seemed to have, even on those on whose attachment he had most relied, and trembled as he looked forward to the future; but old Farnsburg desired him to set at defiance the ban of a meddling priest which the princes of the Empire must assuredly refuse to ratify or the Almighty to approve. 'This very day,' continued he, 'will I issue orders to all the dependants of the Lion, and ere a month is elapsed five hundred of them will be marshalled under my banners, and make this haughty priest tremble within his sanctuary. Even should all thy vassals, horse and man, desert thy Castle walls, yet fear not, the Lion is within himself a host, and will roll back the tide of war though it were ready to swallow thee up.'

Frohburg thanked his friend for this proof of kindness at a moment when he seemed ready to be deserted by all the world, and, recovering his usual serenity, descended to the courtyard where his servants and retainers were assembled.

In those days of feudal oppression Frohburg had ever regarded his vassals rather as children or humble friends than as slaves or dependants subject to every momentary caprice. In the field he had constantly shared their hardships and their dangers, and his arm had ever been ready alike to protect them or revenge their wrongs. Tears stood in the eyes of many of them as they beheld their venerable lord announce that he would not offer a single word to retain such as wished to abandon him in his hour of need.

'Let them go,' said he, 'and may my blessing follow them. Old Frohburg will endeavour with the help of God and the consciousness of a good cause to act without them; but for those who are still willing to stand by him and share the hour of sorrow, he will endeavour to reward them as their bravery and fidelity so justly merit.'

'It is unwillingly,' cried they all in one voice, 'that we desert so good a master, and could we hope that the ban would be soon recalled, we would stand by you for ever.'

'How little I have merited this ban,' said the old man, 'you who know the pretended cause of it can judge as well as I, and whether an unjust sentence can injure me or mine I leave you to decide. Count Farnsburg is condemned as well as I, his servants know it, but not the meanest serf has abandoned his cause.'

Struck by these few words, his followers shouted: 'Then will we live or fall with you also!' Twelve alone who, having large families, feared to expose themselves to the awful consequences of the indignation of the Church, quitted the Castle.

Old Frohburg hastened from the court to conceal the tears of joy which the acclamations of his faithful followers had drawn from him, and, on entering the great hall, found that the knights of the Lion had determined to set the ban at defiance, and tell the bishop to his face the contempt they entertained for his empty threats.

They then hastened to quiet the alarms of the women, whom they found in tears, fearing that their happiness had been interrupted, and that they must languish in painful

uncertainty till this dreaded curse should be recalled; but Farnsburg restored the smile to their faces by assuring them that the festivity of the day should not be interrupted, and desiring them to hasten and deck themselves in their bridal attire.

Joyfully were his orders executed, yet little was he aware that their haste was in vain, and that he had hitherto experienced only the first and slightest effect of that ban which he seemed to despise.

When they reached the chapel door they found it closed against them and a venerable priest of the order of the Lion placed to guard the approach.

'Painful indeed,' said he, 'is the task which I am this day called to perform. You come to receive my blessing and I must drive you back. You stand excommunicated under the ban of our holy Church, nor must your footsteps pollute the threshold of the house of God.'

Farnsburg stepped forward. 'Holy father, son of my own order, recall your words, for it would be painful to me to be forced to doubt the honesty of him I have so long respected.'

The priest replied: 'Doubt if you will; my lord, I must ever submit, but I will act no otherwise than my conscience tells me is right. To wash away one crime you have committed yet a greater. The Lord Himself has said, "On mine anointed shalt thou not lay thine hands." Examine yourself, and say, have you fulfilled His commands?'

'I acknowledge,' said Farnsburg, 'I permitted the death of a monk; but he was a disgrace to his order, a horror to human nature. His hands were red with murder, and his soul blackened with crimes. Say, did his holy orders authorise his guilt, or absolve him from the punishment which God Himself hath denounced upon the murderer?'

'No,' said the priest, 'a double punishment must await him, but not by the hands of a layman. You should have sent him to the bishop, then had he fallen justly, and the Church would have blessed instead of cursing thee.'

'I have not time to argue,' said Farnsburg impatiently,

'these subtleties with you at present, but I ask you again, Will you perform your duty?—Will you marry these persons according to the ordinances of that Church you serve?'

'I cannot,' was the sad answer.

The knights broke in with their exclamations. 'Tremble, proud priest, and dread our instant vengeance!'

The priest bared his bosom. 'Here, strike, nor will I murmur at the blow. You can but rob me of a few short years, nor can I ever die more properly than in the execution of my sacred duty. Nay, do not hesitate, for as well might you think to move yon rock. Until the ban is recalled I cannot marry you, the marriage would be null, and the fruits of it bastards; but God is merciful, nor will His servants be inflexible. Offer them a proper satisfaction, and I will gladly be your messenger. In a short time I trust these sacred doors shall be flung open to receive you, then most joyfully will I bless your union.'

'Well, then, I accept your mediation,' said Farnsburg; 'go and offer proposals of peace to the bishop in my name, and tell him that I will forgive the insult he has offered to my order on condition that he immediately revoke the ban.'

'But remember,' said Frohburg, 'you add, that we only agree to this because hostilities would have retarded the happiness of our children.'

The priest replied: 'If I am to go, and hope to return as a messenger of peace, I fear I must carry very different overtures. But retire a while to the Hall while I affix my seal to these gates, and be assured a ban which no bishop could recall must fall upon the guilty hands that dare to touch them before my return.'

In solemn silence, and with feelings far different from those with which they had lately approached the temple, did the party now return to the Hall, and a tear fell from the eyes of the women as they glanced upon the golden cup which was to have been emptied to their healths. No one ventured to interrupt the silence till the arrival of the priest, who thus addressed the assembly: 'As in my opinion repentance and atonement can alone procure the wished-for pardon, it behoves

me first to convince you of the heinousness of your offence.'

One of the knights said: 'That, holy father, will, I fear, require more eloquence than you are possessed of.'

'We shall see anon,' was the reply. 'In the first place then I ask you, Is not the person of a priest sacred? And that it is, I believe, will hardly be denied; and, if so, then is he who attacks it guilty of a heinous sin.'

'Granted,' said Farnsburg; 'but this respect is seated in the office, not in the person, of him who holds it; if, therefore, he acts so as to disgrace his holy calling, he becomes unworthy of his trust. Nor can he longer claim the privileges annexed to it.'

'Then I find,' said the priest, 'I must make myself better understood. The office of priesthood is sacred in itself and emanates its divine influence on all who hold it. But, should a priest prove unworthy of his holy charge, he must be drawn from the Church, and then consigned to the punishment he has justly merited. But while invested with his sacred robes 'tis sacrilege to touch him. Your followers had not the power to divest him of his holy office, and in raising their hands against him, they have insulted the representatives of God on earth—for this it is the ban is passed, and for this it now behoves you to offer satisfaction to the bishop.'

After a pause Farnsburg said: 'I own myself convinced, and am willing to confess that as a layman I have offended against the dignity of the Church, that in the abbot's death I meant to strike the criminal alone, and not the priest. Sit down then, and write what I shall dictate.

'"I, Count Farnsburg, send to the Bishop of Constance greeting. You have pronounced the ban on me and on my knights, because of summary justice practised by them on the body of the Abbot of St. Mary's Convent. He and his accomplice had dealt with poisons and stained their hands in the blood of innocence. We knew their guilt and punished, and for this has your anathema been hurled against us. Now, conscious of the purity of my intentions I should have answered you with my sword, but that my chaplain has con-

vinced me, that by taking their punishment upon myself, I have offered an insult to the whole Church. I have passed my life chiefly in the field, and am but little skilled in the subtleties of the schools, and foolishly thought that murder was still murder though shaded by a cowl. By this rule, therefore, will you, I trust, now judge, and, not punishing the offence of ignorance alone, agree to recall your ban. In return, I bind myself in future to deliver over to you all iniquitous monks who may cross my path, that you may first strip them of their holy trappings. To thy Church I herewith present ten golden florins as an offering of reconciliation. For this let annual masses be pronounced, that God, in His infinite goodness, may keep all monks from committing heinous crimes, and thus save poor Laymen from undergoing censure for their ignorance." Now, not a word more, and I will sign.'

The priest folded up the writing, and, having got Count Farnsburg's signet, mounted his horse and departed, accompanied by the good wishes of the lovers, and promising to return at the close of the fourth day.

CHAPTER XII.

TRUE to his word, on the morning of the fifth day, however, the sentinel from the watch-tower announced the approach of the worthy old chaplain. No sooner were the joyful tidings proclaimed than Clara, accompanied by Agnes, Bertha, and Maria, hastened to meet him and assail him with questions. His answer was that he carried with him a revocation of the ban, but loaded with such conditions as he feared would render the favour null: conditions which were both degrading in their nature and severe in the fulfilment.

'If so,' exclaimed Clara, 'then, sisters, let us hasten to our knights, lest their love for us might induce them for a moment to listen to such opprobrious terms; for, dearly as I love, yet would I rather languish out my life in solitude, and pine away my youth without one glimmering of hope, than that my Frederick should tarnish the glory of his name or leave the slightest stain upon his knighthood.' Saying this, she flew back to the fortress, and the knights were already informed of the failure of the chaplain's mission ere the old man's tardy steps had reached the Hall.

As he entered, old Farnsburg waved him back exclaiming: 'Old man, be silent, nor dare to speak the haughty Churchman's answer. Dishonourable I know it is, and fear my indignation might lead me to annihilate the first proposer of the base concessions.'

The priest said: 'I have only done my duty, and therefore do not dread your anger. A servant of the Lord must endeavour to be a peacemaker upon earth, and prevent the effusion of human blood; and, though my endeavours have failed, I yet feel happy in the consciousness of having acted as I ought.'

Frohburg then asked: 'Let us at least hear what terms this haughty priest has had the insolence to offer. It may, at all events, serve to sharpen the edges of our swords.'

The priest replied: 'Since you will needs have me speak, I must repeat the truth, and say that it required my utmost eloquence to make the bishop look upon your letter or deign to break the seal, saying it became not a son of the Church to pollute his hands with the writings of the accursed. My entreaties, however, at length prevailed, and he read—but, alas! it was only to feel doubly wroth. He insisted that the abbot and the chaplain had fallen innocent victims to your intemperate rage, the whole of St. Mary's monks having protested their innocence, and backed their assertions by such oaths as he would not for a moment doubt.'

'And pray,' said Farnsburg, 'what does this upright judge —this second Solomon—say to the testimony of all my knights who witnessed the dying villain's confession, and that of his confederates in iniquity?'

The priest replied: 'The bishop refuses, and perhaps with some justice, to receive as evidence the testimony of those who are themselves parties concerned, unless they can be backed by other witnesses. Should you be able to prove the crimes alleged of the deceased by evidence such as can admit of no doubt, then will he acknowledge that their fate was merited, and only demand satisfaction for the violated dignity of the Church.'

'And, pray, sir,' asked Farnsburg, 'what may that be?'

'I must crave your pardon, good my lord,' said the priest, 'if I should again offend your pride, but you require the result of my mission, and I must speak the truth—my lips were never yet guilty of lying. Then listen: To reconcile yourselves to the offended Church you and all your knights, clad in penitential weeds, for three successive days must stand with lighted torches at the great gate of the Cathedral of Constance. There must ye do public penance; and, still as any priest or monk shall enter or come from the church, must ye bow yourselves before him, and, as ye kiss his feet in token of repentance, crave his forgiveness.'

Frohburg sprang from his chair. 'Where is my sword?'

And Farnsburg added: 'Ah, thou hast said the word, my noble friend. Our swords alone can revenge this insult and redress our honours. Arise, my sons! The Lion is become a word of scorn to babes and whining women. The very mice gnaw at his talons, and the hares play near him undismayed! I tell thee, meddling priest, if I do not make thee rue this day, may these grey locks be shorn from my head, and my few remaining years be spent in drudging to some beggarly convent. What! dare to offer such terms to me, an old soldier, the leader of so many heroes! Oh, pardon me, my friends, I know you feel it like myself.'

All the knights cried: 'We do—we feel it as we ought. Then why should we delay? To arms! to arms!'

'Sir priest,' Farnsburg said, 'heard you those shouts like the chafing of the angry tide? Your bishop had better have taken the tiger by the beard than roused their fury. Sons of the Lion, my noble sons, in four days shall this hand point to Constance.'

Unmoved the priest asked: 'Am I permitted to announce to the bishop your design? He may yet relent,' and the effusion of noble blood be spared.'

'Do as you will,' said Farnsburg; 'but, remember, the case is altered. 'Tis I, now, that am offended, and require the fullest satisfaction!'

'My duty calls me, then,' said the priest, 'and I must go! Children of my heart, I trust in heaven these arms shall soon again be opened to receive you. Gladly would I leave you my best blessing, were I not bound to curse you rather. Oh, think of this, and guard your lives in the eventful field. For your corpses must I weep, as of those accursed to all eternity, nor dare I offer up a prayer for your lost souls.' Then, raising his streaming eyes to heaven, the venerable father cried: 'Almighty God, to Thy wise providence do I commit this cause, in which Thy poor servant has striven in vain.' Thus saying, he retired on his second embassy, while the knights were busily employed in preparing for the field. Their coats of mail, which had been laid aside in honour of the ex-

pected revelries, were delivered to their squires, with orders instantly to burnish up the polished steel.

In the course of the evening a messenger arrived from Neuenberg to inform them that the ban had been also affixed to its gates, and had spread such general consternation that only twenty men had ventured to continue in the fortress. The messenger added that the troops from St. Mary's Convent had advanced to its very walls and summoned the knight of the Lion, to whose protection it had been entrusted, to an immediate surrender; and, though he had rejected the proposal with the utmost scorn, he feared he should not be able to hold out for any length of time without considerable succour, as he could place but small reliance on the few that yet remained within the walls. A consultation was immediately held on this new misfortune, in which it was agreed that, as a sufficient number of troops could not be spared to raise the siege, the knights should be desired to quit the fortress secretly, and convey the Countess to the Castle of Frohburg, which a number of chosen men should be left to guard till the return of the rest from Constance; after which Farnsburg pledged his word to Eschenbach that his first care should be to recover the possessions of Maria, which would most probably remain uninjured by the troops of the convent, who would regard them as the property of their employers.

These orders were punctually obeyed and in a few days the Countess of Neuenberg with the most valuable part of her property was safely lodged under Count Frohburg's roof. During this time the different members of the order of the Lion, to whom instructions had been sent, arrived at the Castle, bringing all their dependants and retainers with them to avenge the insult offered to their name. A messenger had also been dispatched to the Avenger of the North, who instantly obeyed the summons; but Farnsburg, fearing it might occasion a dangerous delay should he wait for the arrival of the troops which had been sent to the assistance of the Emperor, resolved to march without them. On mustering their forces the two old veterans were rejoiced to find that they had fifteen hundred well-appointed men, of which three

hundred were to be left to guard the Castle, while the rest should march towards Swabia.

It was with the utmost difficulty that the lovers could free themselves from the arms of their affianced brides, till old Farnsburg ordered them to mount immediately, and then turning to the weeping females: 'Cease your useless tears,' he cried; 'we shall soon all meet again in safety. Swords are weapons that monks can but ill wield. Meanwhile pray for us, and be assured that, although the priest has fixed his seal upon the chapel door, the ear of our Heavenly Father is never closed against the cries of His children, and that His mighty arm will ever protect the cause of the just.'

They halted one day at the fortress of the Lion to make some necessary arrangements for the defence of the Countess, who had been prevented by age and infirmity from accompanying her daughters, and, although the ban had failed to draw away a single retainer from their order, old Farnsburg summoned a number of his faithful vassals, to whose keeping he consigned his fortress. Having placed everything in the best possible state of defence, they continued their march towards Constance.

Before they could reach its walls, however, they were met by a deputation of the citizens who came to implore them to spare the city, but as they came not in the name of the bishop, Farnsburg refused to listen to them, saying that nothing short of the most ample submission from their prelate would induce him to sheath his sword.

To this the bishop positively refused to consent, and the order was accordingly given to advance; but their progress was again arrested and an infinite number of women and children wringing their hands and kneeling in the dust implored their compassion and requested the delay of but half an hour, when the author of the quarrel (the bishop himself) should be placed within their power.

Farnsburg spoke words of comfort to the afflicted multitude, and assured them that at all events the persons of the women and children should be held sacred.

Assured by this promise, they continued to march with

him looking towards the town from whence they soon beheld another troop advancing. It was composed of the burghers unarmed, bearing the bishop and all his canons bound with cords. As they approached the column a venerable old man advanced before the others and begged permission to address the leader of the forces.

'My noble knight,' he said, 'long ere now has the fame of your order reached our ears, and long have we admired the generous and noble principles which lead you to succour the distressed. On these principles do we rely, and beseech you to spare our city, which is unworthy of the powerful Lion. The bishop who has uttered curses on your head do we now deliver to your power, well knowing that you seek not vengeance on him.'

Farnsburg assured the burgher that in believing so he did them but justice, as they only required that an unmerited ban should be recalled. He then presented his hand as a pledge of future peace between his order and the city of Constance, and descending from his horse approached the bishop, asking him in a tone at once firm but respectful if he were now willing to recall his unjust malediction?

The venerable dignitary of the Church however remained inflexible, declaring that although his perfidious flock had treacherously delivered him into the hands of his enemies, yet as a servant of the Most High would he not desert his sacred trust.

'Behold these locks,' he continued; 'in the fulfilment of my duties have they grown grey, and think not that the hopes of dragging on a few more years will make me for a moment stain them with dishonour. Accursed thou art and accursed thou must remain, nor hope by angry looks or threats to drive me to your purpose; the Lord will be my shield and my protector. Nay, try your utmost tortures on me; my weak nerves may tremble, but never think to make these lips pronounce on you or yours a blessing.'

The dignified manner in which this was spoken, the placidity which an inward sense of religion seemed to have spread over the hoary prelate's countenance, as he looked upon

the fetters with which he was bound, in a moment disarmed the indignation of the stern veteran, and, as with his own hand he unbound his cords, he thus addressed him: 'The contest is past; you have conquered, and our strife is at an end. In return for the liberty I give you, I would only beg that your resentment may not reach these unhappy people whom fear alone could prompt to act against your liberty. This yielded, I grant unshackled liberty to you and your friends.'

'Astonishing man!' cried the old priest, 'I will not be outdone in generosity. Your actions have convinced me more than a thousand protestations, and I can resist no longer. Yet one question more to quiet my soul which must soon appear before the presence of its Maker to answer for its deeds. Say, then, was the abbot's guilt fully and clearly established previous to his execution?'

Frederick and all the knights who had attended him to the fortress of Neuenberg swore by the Almighty God that his crimes had been proved beyond even a possibility of doubt.

'Then,' continued the venerable priest, 'his death was merited, and my conscience is at rest. Here, then, I recall my ban, and greet you with a father's blessing. May the Almighty Ruler of the Universe guide and protect you wherever you may go, and should you be doomed to fall in the defence of innocence may your souls wake to eternal bliss.'

The surrounding multitude pronounced a fervent 'Amen,' and rent the air with the loudest shouts. At the request of the worthy ecclesiastic, the knights agreed to accompany him to his palace and spend the day with him, and, in return, he promised on the following to repair with them to the Castle of Frohburg to bestow the nuptial blessing on the impatient lovers.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE harbinger of the morning had been heard several times before the knights thought of rising from the magnificent banquet which the bishop had prepared for them, and the order for an immediate departure was joyfully heard by men accustomed to watching and insensible to fatigue. The impatience of the lovers could but ill brook the short stages which the age and infirmities of the prelate required, but as he easily guessed their anxiety he insisted upon continuing his journey after staying only one day at the Castle of the Lion.

On the fourth from leaving it they had reached the confines of the forest which surrounded the Castle of Frohburg, when the impatience of the four young men made them put spurs to their horses, and they were soon out of sight. The others followed at a distance, till on reaching an opening of the wood with astonishment they beheld their companions standing as if transfixed and gazing with looks of horror towards the beloved home from whence arose thick clouds of smoke and curling flame. The conflagration reached to the very summit of the watch-tower, whose dark pinnacles above could be distinguished through the volumes of smoke. The shrieks of the others on discovering this dreadful spectacle seemed to awake the knights from their state of insensibility, and, again urging on their steeds, they flew to the scene of horror.

By the time they could reach the spot the flames had already gained the palisades and drawbridge, and it was in vain that they attempted to force their way through the devouring element. At length, with the utmost difficulty they swam across the moat, amid showers of burning embers,

and contrived to scale the outward rampart, although they still could discover no human being to give them an account of the beloved ones whom they had left behind.

While endeavouring to find some passage by which he might reach the interior of the building, Frederick's ear caught a shriek of misery which seemed to ascend from the valley. He listened for a moment, and hearing the noise repeated again dashed through the moat, and seizing his horse galloped down the hill followed by the rest of the knights. The continued cries led them to the wood, where they recognised the wives of several of the serfs of the Castle, who, hearing their approach and half frenzied by fear, flung themselves on their knees before the knights and begged for mercy, still believing them to be the enemy from whom they had fled.

It was some time before the trembling wretches could be persuaded that they were surrounded by their friends, and still longer before Frederick could obtain from them a distinct account of the dreadful calamity. He, however, at length gleaned from their disjointed speeches that their mistresses had been carried off by a party of robbers, who, after setting fire to the Castle, had taken the road towards Swabia. It appeared that on the preceding day the ladies, deceived by a false message, had been led to expect the return of their friends, and that their error had been confirmed by the appearance of a troop of knights decked with large white plumes, and bearing the standard of the Lion. Completely deceived, the unfortunate females had hastened from the Castle. Nor was any treachery suspected till too late, and till they were actually in the hands of their ravishers. The troops left to guard the fortress had nobly done their duty, and disputed every inch of ground. A few of them only had survived to be dragged into bondage, and the villains, after setting fire to the Castle with the intention of destroying the females who had been left in it, had galloped off with their prisoners and the plunder of the fortress. The narrator could give no trace to discover the robbers further than that they were accompanied by several monks, who repeatedly

urged them on, and desired them not to spare the lives of any of the accursed, male or female.

Who can attempt to describe the feelings of the father and the lovers on hearing this account? Rage, despair, fury and horror, by turns assailed their souls. From the story of the women, they wished immediately to fly to St. Mary's Convent and raze it to the ground. They doubted not that the monks had been the authors of the cursed deed, but the bishop requested to be heard for a moment. With much difficulty his prayer was granted, when he thus addressed them: 'Believe me, my friends, I more than participate in the misery you feel, and do not wish to stay your vengeance from falling on the accursed authors of this deed, but only request that you may permit me to precede you to the convent. The anxiety to serve you will brace my aged limbs with all the energy of youth, and as all doors must fly open to my holy office, be assured I will allow no corner, no hole, however concealed, to escape my search. Should the monks, as you suspect, prove to have been the spoilers, the women must be found, and rest assured your vengeance shall be complete. The hypocrites after being stripped of that dress they have defiled shall be delivered into your power, and the convent, whose sacred walls they have polluted by their crimes, be levelled with the dust, after removing the precious relics and consecrated vases of the order.'

His reasoning was conclusive, his promise sacred, and the knights immediately agreed to follow him to the convent, leaving some of their number to protect the women and see if any things might be saved from the ruins of the fortress when the flames should have in some degree abated.

The lovers were oppressed with the darkest presages, and often almost overpowered by their despair. Tears traced each other down the furrowed cheeks of the unhappy fathers, when they thought of the probable fate of their daughters, and the whole of the knights participated deeply in the misery of their beloved friends.

Their route lay by the fortress of Neuenberg, and when they approached it on the third day their fury redoubled on

beholding the banner of St. Mary's Convent floating on its battlements; but, obedient to the promise they had given, they encamped in an adjoining wood, while the bishop proceeded towards the convent accompanied by a few attendants on whose secrecy and fidelity he could rely.

On approaching its gates, the great bell was sounded and the new abbot and his members, advancing in procession, knelt to receive his blessing. His keen eye seemed to look them through, and the doubts in which he in no small degree participated arose almost to conviction when he observed that many seemed to shrink from his gaze, and to cast their looks upon the ground. He, however, concealed every symptom of suspicion, and after secretly instructing his attendants to guard every outlet, he entered the convent saying: 'The blessing of the Lord be with you, if you have served Him with pure and upright hearts.' His followers remained to watch and guard the gates.

The abbot further presented the keys, which the bishop accepted without speaking and, having ascended to the dormitory, inspected the cell of each monk, without being able to discover the slightest circumstance to justify his suspicions.

To the astonishment of the abbot, however, he not only descended to the lower apartments, but even to the cellars, where he found wine in abundance, but no trace of any human being. Still was he not satisfied in his own mind, but continued his search, when his eye rested upon some fissures in the wall, which did not seem the work of chance, or to have been wrought by the decaying hand of time. He made no remarks upon the discovery, but, ordering the monks to retire, remained with a few of his own attendants. Then, approaching the object of his suspicions, he called in a loud voice: 'If innocence languishes within these walls, one who has both the inclination and the power to relieve it is near.' 'Thanks be to our merciful God,' was now repeated from several corners of the vault. The worthy prelate's heart throbbed with joy as he heard the sounds, but it was much abated when the continued supplications proved that they were the voices of men who thus implored for mercy and

deliverance. He immediately ordered the trembling abbot to discover the entrance to the dungeon from which the voices proceeded, and, after removing a trapdoor which was artfully concealed by the butts of wine, four human beings loaded with chains were dragged forth to the light. They were merely covered with a few rags, the damp of the place having decayed their garments, and their squalid figures were rendered yet more horrible by their long beards and matted hair. The wretched beings sank on their knees before the bishop, begging for deliverance or else a present death. He raised them kindly from the earth, assuring them of meeting with the most impartial justice, and in the meantime delivered them to the care and attention of his followers, being too anxious to continue the search on which he had come to have time for inquiring into their histories before the following day. Then, turning to the abbot, he threatened him with the most severe punishment if he did not immediately open every secret vault or prison of the convent, hinting that he had but too good grounds for suspecting him to have been concerned in carrying off the ladies from the Castle of Frohburg. The abbot threw himself upon his knees, and protested in the most solemn manner that he had been in no wise concerned, nor did he know anything of the rape alluded to, at the same time swearing that there were no other dungeons whatever belonging to the convent. These asseverations he uttered in such a voice and manner that the bishop was tempted to believe him, but, before he had time to reply, he was summoned to the gate by a confused sound of voices, among which he recognised those of some of his friends.

He felt both astonished and hurt at perceiving the two old warriors, attended by the lovers, insisting upon being immediately admitted and calling upon the names of their daughters and mistresses. It appeared that an unlucky mistake had occurred owing to Frederick's having sent some of his own squires with the attendants on the bishop, with orders to hasten back should they learn any consolatory news. When the alarm was given that some prisoners had been discovered

in a secret dungeon, they had instantly hurried back to the knights to inform them that the ladies had been found.

The true explanation in a moment banished their short-lived joy, and they hung their heads in despondency while they shuddered to behold the wretched victims to whom the bishop's servants were administering food and comfort. The knights ordered their attendants to provide these unhappy beings with other clothes, but would not stay to ask them any questions, being at present too much engrossed by their own sorrows. The bishop, anxious to serve his friends, but at the same time to protect the monks if innocent, ordered the abbot either to justify himself fully so as not to leave a doubt upon the minds of the knights, or to expect the most exemplary punishment.

Frederick then proved that the convent had already been convicted of harbouring murderers and incendiaries, and that the daughter of Count Neuenberg had been carried off by some of its members and long concealed in a dungeon belonging to the convent. That, therefore, it could not be wondered at if suspicion should now fall upon them. In reply, the abbot did not pretend to deny or justify the conduct of his predecessors, but again persisted in his perfect innocence, and offered to submit himself, his monks, and every part of the convent to the strictest examination. He did more, for at Frederick's request, which was backed by an order from the bishop, he instantly resigned all claim to the fortress of Neuenberg, and agreed to deliver it with all its domains to be held by the Knights of the Lion for the Countess of Neuenberg and her daughter, the lawful heirs. The offer of the abbot was acceded to, and the knights proceeded to examine every part of the convent, but without success, as not the slightest appearance of deceit, or of any concealed person, could be found.

In the course of their search they also visited the vault in the forest, where the unfortunate Maria had been formerly confined, but it remained in the same situation in which it had been left by Frederick, and they now began to look upon the monks as entirely guiltless in the present instance.

To the inquiry who were the prisoners whom the bishop had rescued, the abbot answered that on the day which saw him elevated to his present dignity the keys of the prison had been yielded up to him, while at the same time an oath was exacted that he should never open it, never seek to see or deliver the prisoners whose crimes were of a nature almost unheard of, and whose punishment was but much too mild for the enormity of their offences. They have always received their daily food of bread and water in a basket which is lowered down into their dungeon. 'But you may ask them,' continued he, 'whether they have not frequently found both meat and wine instead of their usual allowance, since my arrival at the convent. My oaths forbade me to do more.' The bishop reproved him for having bound himself by any vow before he had learned if the terms of it were just or not, and then, desiring him to retire for the night, he also lay down to seek a few hours' repose for his aged limbs, as he intended on the following morning early to make over the fortress of Neuenberg with all due solemnity into the hands of the knights whose troops had already invested it on all sides.

After the bishop had retired, the rest of the party, who felt no inclination to sleep, determined to sit up the whole night, and requested one of the lay brothers to furnish them with a stoup of wine. This man attracted their notice, as while filling their tankards he shook his head and then gazed on them mysteriously sighing at the same time. They longed to question him, and a large scar across his forehead served as an excuse for entering into conversation with him.

'Sir Knights,' said he, in answer to the question of how he had received the wound, 'I have not always been the wretched thing you see me, nor were these brows always shaded by a cowl. I have ere now borne arms against the Turk, and this honourable scar was received from the scimitar of a Saracen trooper on the plains of Palestine, but I am now obliged in my old days to seek a scanty sustenance among these monks. You are not so well acquainted with them,' continued the old man, 'as I am, else you would not so readily take their words for gospel. Had I been you, I would

have extended my search to the chapel, for sure it can be no offence to the Almighty for a person to reclaim his own if found within His sanctuary.'

'Old man, in the name of God,' said Frederick, 'I conjure thee, speak! Oh, haste and reveal all that thou knowest, all that thy mysterious words imply, and the richest reward shall be thine, or if a slavish fear of these vile hypocrites restrains thee, say but the word and instantly thou shalt be carried to my father's towers and treated as a son.'

The lay brother then, for such he was, rejoined: 'Listen then, and I will disclose all that I know—all that my fears lead me to suspect. Some nights ago, as I was sleeping in my cell, I was suddenly awoke by an uncommon noise. I started from my pallet and followed the sounds, which led me to the chapel. It was lighted up by torches, but stooping down I crept behind a huge column, where, completely concealed myself, I could observe all that was passing. A number of armed knights accompanied by several of our monks stood round an open vault, into which, as I arrived, they were lowering down a coffin, while they murmured a prayer in a voice hardly audible. The moment this was done, they rolled the marble stone over the mouth of the vault and hastened to the portal, where they parted with mutual congratulations.

'Fearing to be discovered I hastened back to my cell, and since then have often thought with wonder on this mysterious funeral of which I never heard the slightest mention made. I cannot pretend to say that this is in anywise connected with the object of your search, and yet I think you ought to examine the coffin. I trust in God it may not be found to contain any of the beloved ones for whom you seek, and that it may prove to have been the only one interred that night. But yet I cannot but think it will lead to some important discovery.'

At the commencement of this narration the knights had crowded round the lay brother, listening with the most painful attention. When he mentioned the mysterious funeral they shuddered, but when he hinted at the possibility of its object they covered their faces with their hands in a state of the most dreadful horror. It was long before they could summon up

resolution enough to follow the advice of the lay brother, fearing by the confirmation of his suspicions to blast the last trace of hope by which they clung.

Frederick was the first who could summon up courage to speak, and desire the lay brother to light a torch and conduct them to the vault. As they advanced the two old Counts were obliged to be supported, their strength having abandoned them in the fears of finding their children murdered. On reaching the church, with the force of despair the stone was lifted from the opening, and hope once more began to animate their hearts when they found that only one coffin was deposited in the vault. Four black seals were suspended from the corners of it, but none of the lovers dared to lift the lid, fearing to behold the beloved of his heart. At length one of the knights undertook the office, while those most nearly interested turned away, seeming to await their sentence of death.

A solemn silence followed after the lid was torn up. Within the coffin lay a female form. Her hands and feet were bound with chains, a thick veil concealed her face and three daggers were fixed in her heart up to their hilts. With a trembling hand the knight ventured to raise the veil, and the anxious lovers and the almost fainting fathers began to breathe, when he declared that he had never before seen the face.

They all now approached, but horror made them start back when Eschenbach and Weisenborn recognised the features of the unhappy Countess of Neuenberg. The dreadful spectacle which they witnessed made them tremble lest a similar fate should have overtaken those more dear to them, and in the first ebullition of their indignation they would have hurried to the abbot's apartment and sacrificed him to their fury, when one of them observed a leaden tablet on which some characters were engraved, affixed to the head of the coffin. Frederick, in hope that it might tend to lead to some discovery, seized the torch from the hand of the lay brother and read as follows:

'Threefold is our order, three daggers rust in the heart of our victim, three are suspended to our girdles, and three hang over the head of the man who shall dare to challenge our action, or revenge our victim's death.'

'And if they were a thousand I defy them,' cried Frederick, while the others echoed his words, and joining hands over the murdered Countess swore to avenge her fall or perish in the attempt. They replaced the lid upon the coffin, but carried off the four signets and the leaden tablet, and by the persuasion of Farnsburg resolved to communicate to the bishop the horrid discovery which they had made. When he learned the particulars his indignation fully equalled theirs, and he instantly commanded the abbot to be summoned to his presence.

He obeyed the order, but instead of betraying any signs of fear, or conscious guilt, when accused of having been accessory to the murder, he calmly replied: 'Hear me, my lord, and then judge if I have merited the dreadful name of murderer with which you brand me. It is now some eight years since I acted as porter to this convent, when one night I was roused from my pallet by a loud knocking at the outer gate. On opening it, I perceived, by the light of the lamp which I held, nine armed knights who immediately demanded to be admitted to the presence of my superior.

'I conducted them to his cell, when one of them without any preface addressed the abbot in nearly the following words: "We are come, venerable father, to crave a boon which we trust thy goodness will not hesitate to grant. We belong to an order composed of three hundred knights, bound by the strictest bonds of unity. We are in want of a burying ground, and knowing that there are several vaults to spare within this chapel, are come to beg for one or more, nor shall you find us ungrateful if you will listen to our prayer."

'The abbot consented to have three repaired, and gave the order for their use, on condition of receiving three hundred golden florins, and that three more should be paid each time a body was brought for interment, besides three for a solemn mass to be said for the deceased. Since that time,' continued the abbot, 'they have been in the frequent habit of using our chapel. They have constantly brought the corpses at the hour of midnight, and have ever treated any of our members who attended on such occasions with the utmost respect.

Nor will I conceal from you that to these unknown knights were we indebted for those troops that invested the fortress of Neuenberg when the retreat of your friend saved the effusion of much blood.

'It is now about a month since the first of their vaults was entirely filled, when these knights affixed a black seal to the entrance and at the same time presented me with a small packet which I was enjoined to deliver to anyone that might be desperate enough to break their seals. Since then the only coffin brought by them is that which your bold hands have dared to violate, and I fear that you may but too soon have cause to regret the rash deed. As for myself and every member of the convent, I can swear that we never knew the contents of any of them, but firmly believed them to enclose the dead of their own order.'

Farnsburg requested to see the packet which had been consigned to the abbot's care. This he complied with, but at the same time warned him that by opening it he would inevitably draw upon himself the indignation of a powerful order. This threat was but little likely to intimidate the veteran, who, seizing the parchment, tore open the three black seals with which it was closed and then read aloud:

'Presumptuous and daring! Whosoever thou art, three times one hundred daggers are pointed at thy breast. The curse which was pronounced by three Popes and nine Bishops shall fall upon thy wretched head if thou darest to break the seal that is affixed to our vault. Thy hand shall shrink and wither up, thy limbs shall rot and thy whole frame stink above the earth, for the seal is composed of subtle poison amalgamated with curses, which will impregnate itself with thy blood and dry up every source of life. Abandon then thy purpose if thou hast ever dared to form it and fear the power of the united three times three. If thou would'st know more of us, wait till the moon shall have filled her orb; then at the midnight hour, when the wolf howls, expect us where four roads meet close by some sacred fane, there will you find us ready to answer your questions whatever they may be.'

The writing was signed with three crosses. As the con-

tents of it were read, the bishop and the abbot trembled, and entreated Farnsburg not to think of breaking the seal of the vault. To this he replied that had there been any chance of finding in it the bodies of those they sought, he would have braved their spells and curses; but as it had been closed for upwards of a month, and the unknown knights offered to meet him face to face, he would not needlessly disturb the ashes of the dead. On inquiring the age of the moon, he learned that since three days she was on the wane. Unable to restrain his impatience till she should again be full he determined to write and leave his letter at the convent where he understood some of the knights of that order were in the constant practice of calling. His letter was thus worded:

'Unknown knights, ye have murdered an innocent lady. Her corpse still calls for vengeance from St. Mary's Aisle. Over her unburied coffin have my noble brothers in arms sworn destruction to her foul assassins. The Castle of my faithful ally, Count Frohburg, has been burnt to the ground, and his daughters and mine basely borne away. Of this foul deed I here accuse you, and dare ye to the field that God's justice may decide between us. By the writing left with St. Mary's Abbot, I see myself summoned to meet you at full moon where four roads meet, but should this letter reach you ere then, you will find some of my knights stationed at every crossing road in Swabia. Should you not meet my challenge, know I will mark you down for infamy, and to the common gibbet will I nail your seals, of which I have torn four from the murdered lady's coffin—that thus the world may know and scorn your murderous trade. (Signed) BENNO, Count of Farnsburg, Knight of Swabia, and Commander of the noble Order of the Lion.'

This letter the abbot promised to deliver faithfully, and as the sun had already risen beyond the tops of the tall oaks, the knights prepared to move towards the fortress of Neuenberg of which the bishop was to put them formally in possession. At the moment of departure, they recollected the unfortunate prisoners, and, on inquiring for them, learnt to their sorrow and surprise that they had all expired that morning, the

sudden change of air and diet having probably proved too much for their exhausted frames.

The knights convinced themselves by their own eyes of the fatal truth, and now regretted when too late that they had neglected to inquire into the stories of the unfortunate wretches.

On their way to the fortress of Neuenberg, the bishop in vain endeavoured to speak comfort to the despairing lovers. Grief had sunk too deep into their hearts, while the fate of the Countess of Neuenberg seemed to forebode still greater misery. On gaining the fortress they were tempted to search every apartment of the building with which Weisenborn was well acquainted, but no trace of their lost treasure was to be found, and thus perished the last glimmering of hope.

CHAPTER XIV.

On the following day the intentions of their visit being accomplished and a proper guard left in the Castle, the worthy prelate, finding his services no longer wanted, returned home, promising to join them as soon as he should learn that the beloved objects of their search were found, and bidding them trust to providence for the dawning of a brighter day. After the departure of the bishop it was resolved that the intervening space till the next full moon should be spent by the old Counts at the Castle of the Lion, while the knights should be dispatched in every direction in search of the women.

Frederick, attended by his three young friends, took the road leading to Frohburg in hopes of gathering some further intelligence. They travelled with the utmost expedition, and on the morning of the third day reached a hill from whence the gloomy Castle used formerly to be seen in all the pride of Gothic magnificence, but its site could now only be guessed by a mass of smoking ruins. Some of the vassals were at that moment employed in removing part of the rubbish in hopes of finding something to reward their toil. Among them Frederick recognised some of the former servants of the Castle who had escaped the fury of their enemies on the fatal night, but from them he could gain little additional information, as they had made their escape by a private postern early in the fray. They, however, suggested the probability of the ravishers being the adherents of Rothberg, who had committed the foul deed in revenge of his death.

A vassal whose abode lay in the forest at some distance from the fortress was enabled to give a more satisfactory account. He stated that the robbers had halted for some

time in the vicinity of his hut, and enabled him to observe their appearance. Their number, he said, seemed to amount to about three hundred, and they were all habited in black armour, wearing round their necks golden collars to which three crosses were attached.

Adelaide, Clara, and the three other ladies whom he remembered to have seen at the Castle were with them.

To the delight of Frederick and the others, the vassal added that the Black Knights seemed to treat their prisoners with the utmost respect, and that while they halted by his cottage to procure some water for the ladies, he heard one of the knights, who seemed to be invested with some authority and wore a larger collar than the others, assure Clara on his knightly word that she and her companions should at some future period be restored to their lovers. Soon after their departure, the narrator continued, there arrived a second troop, seemingly composed of priests and monks, who led a horse on which lay the corpse of a female, whose face however he had not seen. Although Frederick could not implicitly rely on the assurances which the stranger knight was reported to have given to Clara, yet he could not but feel some degree of comfort in learning that she had hitherto been treated with respect, and he determined to follow wherever he could discover any traces of them, after giving proper orders for having the Castle of Frohburg rebuilt.

In pursuance of this plan, they continued their search upon the following day. As they stood at a spot where several roads crossed each other, they observed a hermit advancing, from whom they learnt that some days before he had seen five ladies answering their description, attended by a vast number of knights, but who, instead of being clothed in black armour, wore arms of polished steel with blue scarfs richly embroidered in silver. The women, he said, bore evident marks of the deepest dejection, and as they passed him seemed to implore assistance, but as they were travelling towards Berne with great expedition, they were soon out of his sight. The difference of the strangers' armour struck Frederick with surprise, but, as the description answered in all other respects,

he thanked the holy father for his welcome intelligence, and hastened along the road he had described. Ere sunset they reached a large pile of building, which had formerly been a fortress of considerable strength, but now served as an inn. On entering the courtyard they renewed their questions as formerly, and soon learned from their talkative host that eleven nights before he had harboured the ladies and knights such as described by the hermit, but cruelly did he wound the feelings of his hearers when he told them that the five beautiful women who accompanied the knights had evinced no signs of grief, but on the contrary had shown the utmost joy and merriment; while at supper they had [with their own hands filled the goblets which were repeatedly emptied to their healths, and at length seated themselves most familiarly upon the knees of the knights, who stole numberless kisses from their willing lips!

The feelings which this account raised in the minds of the hearers may be easily conceived. They could have no reason to doubt the truth of a testimony given with so many minutely cruel circumstances. In their indignation they cursed the whole perfidious sex, and swore to trace their steps with additional diligence and sacrifice them with their cursed paramours. Instead of retiring to rest, they paced the chamber the livelong night cursing their untoward fate, and, as soon as they thought their horses able to continue their march, they leapt into their saddles and hastened on the tracks of the spoilers. That night their indignation was, if possible, increased by learning at the hostelry where they halted that there the ladies had slept in the same apartment with five of the sable knights, whom from their manner the host had regarded as their husbands. The storm of contending passions which this information raised in the minds of the wretched wanderers baffles all description. It came like the stroke of the assassin, and nothing but the thirst of revenge, which now wholly actuated them, could have induced them to advance.

On the following day, however, they lost all traces of the fugitives. It was in vain that they spent several days in the

vicinity of a forest, at the entrance to which they had received the latest accounts that could be relied upon. No house or hovel, no path or road, was left unsearched, no passenger permitted to proceed till they had questioned him. Every attempt proved fruitless, and as the moon was nearly filled, they were obliged to abandon their inquiry for the time and return to the Castle of the Lion, which they reached on the night previous to that appointed by the sealed parchments. Frederick was shocked at being obliged to relate the account which he had heard, but the cooler judgment of the two old Counts, and their reliance on the well-known virtue of their daughters, made them more than suspect the truth of those reports which had almost driven the young men to distraction; but in particular the aged Countess rejected the whole as a tissue of the vilest falsehoods. Her eyes once more sparkled with all the fire of youth, and a momentary hectic flush passed across her pale cheek, while she declared that no daughter of Farnsburg would be guilty of such meretricious conduct, and that the knight who could believe it for a moment was unworthy of their hands. Count Lewis also agreed with his mother, and regretted that his father had not permitted him to accompany the others, when he would have forced the impious author of such falsehoods to have confessed the truth. Frederick and his friends, while they begged forgiveness of the offended parents, felt secretly rejoiced that there should remain a hope that their mistresses had been faithful. Doubly impatient now to fulfil their challenge and meet the unknown knights, Frederick with his tried companions and Count Lewis, as the midnight hour approached, hastened to place themselves on a spot beyond the edge of the forest where four roads met near a convent of Benedictine monks. The night was stormy and uncommonly dark, for the moon, though at the full, was constantly obscured by volumes of black clouds, borne rapidly across her surface, and the coruscations of the lightning by contrasting rendered the obscurity still more dreadful. As they passed through the forest the tall oaks were bowed to the ground, while whirlwinds of dried leaves and dust were driven in the faces of

their steeds, already startled by the phosphoric exhalations of the morass, and the distant howlings of the wolf.

At length the trampling of horses was distinctly heard. The Knights of the Lion closed their ranks, and drawing their swords awaited the approach of the horsemen. Seven knights, but bearing neither sword nor lance, descended from their panting steeds. As soon as they had reached the open space, they desired their squires to lead the horses to a distance, and, without deigning to notice Frederick or his companions, ranged themselves on the opposite side of the way. On being asked who they were, and what they sought at that hour, one of them replied that they were candidates for the holy order of Black Knights.

'Wretched, deluded victims,' cried Frederick, 'hence! Begone while it is yet time. Black is the armour of these men, but blacker far their souls. If you wish to become the protectors of innocence, or saviours of the oppressed, haste to quit this spot before a damned oath shall bind you to destruction.'

The strangers, who conceived him to be one of the Black Knights, and regarded his words as a trial of their firmness, answered accordingly, and before Frederick had time to undeceive them his attention was called away by the trampling of horses' feet. He spurred on to meet them. Twenty-seven knights cased in black harness passed him. As the last approached Frederick couched his lance, and, crossing before him, exclaimed: 'Think not to pass, one of you at least shall answer me.'

The Black Knight at once replied: 'Welcome, valorous Knight of the Lion, I would offer you my hand, did I not know that at present you would spurn my courtesy, but anon your doubts shall vanish. Tarry till I call the knight Feargod, who bears for you a message from our commander.'

'I shall await him here,' answered Frederick, proudly, while the Black Knights proceeded to the spot where the strangers were standing. Nine of the knights conducted the candidates to the neighbouring chapel, through the painted casements of which a brilliant illumination was soon discovered. The

others returned to Frederick, whom their leader thus addressed:

'Noble stranger, I would crave your name.'

'Frederick, Count of Frohburg, Knight of the Lion, and I stand here by the command of my noble chief to defy thee to the field, that God may judge betwixt him and you.'

The dark horseman replied:

'Your order is not now made known to me for the first time, nor will I imbrue my sword with any of its noble blood. And yet you shall have ample satisfaction. Hear me, but in silence, and you yourself shall be our judge. Learn, then, it was not we who, robber-like, destroyed your father's towers, nor did our swords drink the blood of his poor vassals. They fell by the hands of the followers of Freidau, of Dornegg, and of Mönchstein, whose indignation you yourself had called down.'

''Tis false!' Frederick cried. 'What proofs can you adduce?'

'Impetuous youth,' calmly replied the sable warrior, 'hear me to an end. I tell you again it was so, and as by chance we were passing the forest we met the troopers encumbered with their spoil. Among their prisoners we recognised Neuenberg's Countess. We own we were her executioners, but her fate was merited, and may her blood rise up against us at the mercy-seat, if otherwise.'

'Foul fiend!' exclaimed Eschenbach, 'it will, and the base deed shall drag thy soul to hell.'

'Amen, I say, Sir Knight, if she were guiltless,' said the Black Knight.

'This must be decided afterwards; but say, where are the other ladies? said Frederick.

'They live in health and safety,' said the Black Knight, 'and soon shall ye'—here the bell of the convent was heard, and the stranger crying 'my sacred duty summons me away; if you would learn more, follow to the church,' clapped spurs to his steed, and was instantly out of sight.

Frederick and his companions, guided by the glare of the chapel window and the bell, which continued to toll at intervals, hastened after, and entered the church as the Black

Knights were closing round the altar, which was lighted up by a profusion of lamps. In the centre stood the seven candidates, without sword or helm. A priest clad in holy garments ascended the steps leading to the altar, and, after pronouncing a short prayer, turned towards the knights and thus addressed them:

'The moon has once more filled her orb since your mother sent you forth to gather ears of wheat; say, have your labours been successful, and do you return loaded with good seed?'

The Black Knight replied: 'We have laboured in the field, but the tares had overspread the ground. Seven knights alone would listen to the voice of instruction, and they now stand ready to devote their arms to the service of the Church, and war against the infidels who seek to undermine the rock on which she stands.'

The priest commanded the candidates to be brought forward, and placing his hands upon their heads, 'You are welcome,' he said. 'In the name of your weeping mother, I greet you, for much does she require your aid and support. Hard is the battle which you must fight, yet great will be your reward both in this world and in the next. Follow me then that I may consecrate you as children of the Most High, as knights of the holy Church.'

The priest now descended from the altar, and, followed by the candidates and the Black Knights, quitted the chapel. Frederick and his companions were deliberating whether they ought to follow, when an old priest requested them to enter the convent. He conducted them along an open corridor to a small apartment at the further end, where he requested them to remain till the knights should have finished their business, when they would join them in hopes of spending the night in friendly converse. The apartment was hung with blue arras, and against the wall was suspended an enormous shield on which was emblazoned a rich cross. They approached to examine it. Then, with a rush, the floor suddenly yielded under them, and they descended to a considerable depth, till they found themselves in a dark vault, repenting,

when too late, the imprudence which had thus betrayed them into the hands of the conspirators.

At this period the storm, which had begun to indicate itself an hour back, had reached its height, and seemed to threaten universal destruction. The peals of thunder succeeded each other so rapidly that the echo of the rocks had barely time to reverberate the sound ere it was followed by another still more awful, while the loftiest oaks were torn up by the roots. At length a deluge fell from the bursting clouds, the torrents poured from the steep mountains, and the valley soon resembled a vast lake. Among the many who found a grave in the world of waters were Frederick's attendants, who with their horses were swept away by the torrent.

Count Farnsburg and his guests had spent a sleepless night listening to the fury of the tempest, and anxiously expecting the return of their sons; but when morning dawned and brought with it a cessation of the storm, their impatience could be no longer restrained, and, dispersing their servants in different directions, they mounted their horses, and sallied forth in dreadful anxiety. They had reached the banks of a river, which had not retired within its natural banks, and were on the point of inquiring at a convent which appeared at a little distance in what direction to proceed, when they were conducted by the screams of their attendants to a spot where a horrid sight awaited them. Frederick's favourite black charger lay dead upon the bank, while his squire still held the bridle in the convulsive grasp of death. The unhappy fathers, never doubting that their sons had perished amid the waters, gave way to the most unbounded grief.

But we must leave them and their sorrows to return to the knights, who, having remained for so many hours without sustenance of any kind, and finding no possibility of escaping from the dungeon, had prepared themselves to sustain a fate which they regarded as inevitable, with the utmost firmness.

Just as they had vowed not to allow the slightest complaint to pass their lips, an iron door which had escaped their notice grated on its hinges, and a common trooper bearing in his hand a lighted torch entered the dungeon, and ieiously

commanding them to deliver up their arms. Indignant at the order, Frederick sprang forward to chastise the insolent wretch, when he escaped, and the door closed of itself with a dreadful crash. By the assistance of the torch which the trooper had dropped in his flight, the knights now attempted to force the iron door, when a voice from above addressed them, saying: 'Wretched mortals, you exhaust yourselves in vain; nine doors similar to that bar all passage. Your strength and your swords will alike prove useless. Then say, what further can you hope? Let me advise you. Yield up those arms which can be of no further service, then will I descend to speak with and comfort you.' 'Never,' replied Frederick. 'We have sworn to surrender our arms but with our lives.' 'Your noble and intrepid courage,' continued the voice, 'tends but to increase my admiration. Oh, had I only nine such heroes under my command, my name should long be remembered among the sons of men! Swear then not to turn your arms on me and I will descend.' Frederick promised that he should be safe, provided he came unarmed, and in a few seconds a venerable-looking knight entered the dungeon.

He was followed by several attendants bearing wine and food, which they deposited upon a projecting shelf of the rock, and then retired, leaving several torches which completely illuminated the vault.

The old knight was wrapped in a large black cloak and unarmed, his forehead was shaded by a few grey locks. His looks were at once open, mild and friendly, and a large scar upon his face, by showing that he had ere now stood in the front of the battle, claimed respect. His proffered hand, however, was proudly rejected by Frederick, who said, 'We promised you safety, but not friendship. My hand's my own and I never give it but as a passport to my heart.'

The fine old soldier replied without anger: 'Perhaps I have not followed the nearest path which leads to that, and yet to gain it was all my wish. Ere long I trust I shall be able to prove the purity of my intentions, but first let me entreat you to partake of that food which I regret you should have so long wanted, for well I know that hunger cannot tame

the Lion, but rather serves to rouse his wrath.' Thus saying, he filled a goblet with wine and presented it to Frederick, who fearing some treachery refused to drink, but the old man, guessing his suspicions, drank the first cup and then presented one to each of the knights, who no longer refused the offer, and found themselves refreshed and strengthened by the beverage. 'Now,' said the old man, 'I owe you an explanation of the past, and I will give it you. To begin then, I again swear we are no incendiaries, and I am willing to assist you in punishing the followers of Friedau and of Dornegg. As to the ladies, we rescued them from their ravishers by the strength of our arms; they were ours by the right of conquest. Have you ever deigned to ask them back, and would you think that we unasked should yield so rich a treasure?

'Thus, Sir Knight, could I answer all your questions, did I not seek to satisfy the friend and not the man; but I will fling away all dissimulation, and speak openly to you.

'Know, then, I have the honour to command an order which, like the oak, expands its mighty arms across the forest, while hundreds rest beneath its shade. Its numbers are more than twenty times your strength, though I must own with shame your virtues and your valour own no equal.

'Nine moons ago, when the twenty-seven branches were gathered round the parent trunk, I was entreated to seek to graft your noble order to our mighty stem, and to obtain the wished-for end no means were thought improper. Your insult offered to St. Mary's Convent (a child of our adoption) barred the milder path of courtesy and friendship; necessity obliged me to try this other, and fortune favoured my utmost wishes. Your brides—your second selves—were mine; and had my voice been listened to, we had resigned the prize and made you ours from gratitude, but I was forced to yield to the opinion of the multitude, and the widow of Hagberg, Count Farnsburg's daughter, your sister, and Maria of Neuenberg were carried to a convent in Italy.

'You seem astonished, but hear me to an end. Our order requires the strictest celibacy. Now, anxious as we were to call you ours, we beheld in our beauteous prizes a bar to all

our hopes, and therefore wished to hide them beyond the possibility of discovery; but, lest your indefatigable zeal might trace us out, we bribed the hosts of the different places where we halted in our flight, and who are all dependent on our order, to deceive you by false accounts, in hopes of disgusting you with the thoughts of women. Our artifice, however, I learn, has failed, as you are bound by sacred oath never to abandon that order to which you now belong.'

'What seek you then?' asked Frederick.

He replied: 'That will I explain in a few words. Our order has a two-fold aim; the one you cannot contribute towards but by becoming a member, therefore it must remain a secret; the other is God-like in its nature, and its accomplishment is the duty of every good Christian.

'Then swear to me that you and your order shall for a year assist in furthering this noble cause. Instant liberty shall be granted to you, and the objects of your love restored.'

The old man paused, but as he could observe that Frederick still seemed to hesitate, he went on to say that the duty he required of them was to lend their aid to rear the Blessed Cross, and drive the infidels and Saracens from the Holy Land. He then, in the most energetic manner deplored the defenceless state of the Christian Church in Palestine, and the inestimable reward in a future world which must be the glorious lot of those who might fall in her support.

Frederick listened to his arguments with the most marked attention, but, while he owned their force, refused to comply with them till he should have obtained the consent of Count Farnsburg, as one of the statutes of their order prohibited its members from exercising their prowess beyond the precincts of their own country.

The old knight confessed that their commander had formerly rejected similar overtures upon the same grounds, but that he had reason to believe the Count would now be more inclined to yield, as a hundred of his chosen knights, with all their squires and horses, were now in the power of the Black Knights. 'Yours alone,' continued he, addressing Frederick, 'in attempting to escape, were swept away by last night's

storm, and your father and Count Farnsburg, as I have learned by some of my scouts, are at this moment tearing their grey locks, for they deem that you were overtaken by a similar fate.'

The old man observed the powerful effect which this insinuation seemed to have upon the mind of his hearer, and conversant with every spring that actuates the human mind, as well as endowed with the most powerful eloquence and sophistry, proceeded to describe the mental agonies which the wretched ladies must experience, which would probably ultimately induce them to take the veil, to which, even now, Adelaide seemed more than half inclined, a sentiment which of course the nuns would strive by every artifice in their power to confirm.

These remarks produced all the effects proposed by the wily orator, and Lewis and the other knights succeeded in making Frederick give the wished-for promise. He accordingly agreed to take the responsibility upon himself, and, in return for the grant of liberty to all, the knights of the Lion promised that they would rear their banner for the space of one year upon the plains of Palestine. The vow was no sooner given than the old man offered immediately to furnish a guide, who should conduct the impatient lovers to the convent where their mistresses were confined, agreeing to remain as a hostage at the Castle of Farnsburg till their return. He also delivered to Frederick a signet ring, whose power the nuns would acknowledge, and on seeing it deliver up their prisoners, and concluded by informing them that every house or fortress, church or convent, whose portals might be seen crowned by a shield bearing three oak-leaves and a dagger, stood in bond and league with their order; and that Frederick had only to salute their owners in the name of the three times three united, and present the branch of a tree, to be admitted and treated with every mark of courtesy.

Frederick requested to know when they should be summoned to fulfil their promise, and turn their steps towards Asia, and if they might not be permitted to solemnise their nuptials previous to their departure; and his joy may be easily conceived when the old man assured him that they had yet a

long period to devote to love, as the Crusade would not be ready to depart before the ensuing spring.

He then craved the hand of each, as an assurance that all enmity was for ever at an end.

This request all the knights complied with, saving Eschenbach, who turning from him cried: 'No father weeps for my return, here will I remain.' 'But think of your Maria,' said Weisenborn. 'It is because I think of her,' replied Eschenbach, 'that I remain. Over her mother's lifeless form did I and all of you swear never to cease till her foul murder was revenged. You have forgotten your vow, but again I renew it, and no power shall make me stir from this till I have dyed these hands in the blood of her assassin.'

Frederick, struck by these words and the recollection of his oath, thanked Eschenbach for his timely warning, and vowed to remain by him, as did all the other knights. Eschenbach, however, positively refused to accept a sacrifice which would necessarily occasion so much misery to others. 'I absolve you of your oath,' said he, 'and will myself fulfil it.'

The old man, after for some time witnessing the generous contest between the knights who refused to abandon their friend, stepped forward and offered to adduce such unquestionable evidence of the Countess of Neuenberg's guilt, as would make them unanimously acknowledge the justice of her fate. Eschenbach, however, still refused to leave the spot till the Countess's death should be revenged, as he persisted in believing the mother of his Maria entirely guiltless.

The old Count again vowed to prove his assertions, but added that it would require a period of at least a month to collect all the evidence. 'In the meantime,' continued he, 'go, generous knights, where love and duty point the way. Free and untrammelled by any oath I restore you to your wives and fathers, nor shall I hold you as in any wise bound, if, ere the lapse of the moon, you do not acknowledge that the fate of Neuenberg's widow was merited.'

His proposal seemed so fair and even generous that they at once accepted it and his proffered hand. Eschenbach alone refused to grasp a hand on which the blood of innocence

seemed to reek. The old man merely smiled, and, while he expressed a hope that some future day Eschenbach would find him deserving of his friendship, he conducted the knights through nine iron doors, the last of which opened into the quadrangle of the convent.

Here a proper guide being provided they mounted, and urging their steeds with the utmost speed they reached the Castle of Farnsburg, when the joyful shouts of the sentinels who observed their approach awoke the fainting mother and restored the despairing fathers to a scene of unexpected bliss, which may be conceived but cannot be described.

CHAPTER XV.

After the first moments given to filial affection were past, Frederick related the occurrences of the last eventful night.

The safety of their daughters, and the certainty of soon beholding them, induced the two old Counts to approve of the promise which Frederick had given in the name of the whole order.

'I well remember,' said Farnsburg, 'that I formerly rejected the proposal of joining the Crusaders, and perhaps the numerous misfortunes which have been since then poured on this wretched head are but the just visitations of an offended God. I will resist no longer. One half of my knights shall rear the Blessed Cross, while the others shall remain to guard their paternal fires.'

On this subject, and the probability of the Countess of Neuenberg's guilt, they continued long to converse.

On turning to appeal to Eschenbach for his opinion, he was first discovered to be absent, and, as he did not appear in the course of that day or the following, they determined not to delay their intended journey, and accordingly took the road to Italy accompanied by the knight who had been furnished as their guide.

He was a man considerably advanced in life, though a particular gravity of manner, and a face much burned by the sun, gave him an appearance of age, which the keenness of his eye and the sinewy muscles of his arm seemed to belie. He told the knights that he had spent many years, and shed no little of his blood, on the sandy plains of Palestine, and that he intended to return again the following spring, when he trusted he

might find that eternal rest, which he had often in vain courted; but when any of his companions wished to know the cause of his sorrows he refused to satisfy their curiosity or make any answer whatever. Another circumstance which added to the astonishment of the knights was that whenever the names of Eschenbach and Maria were mentioned in the course of conversation, the stranger seemed to shudder involuntarily, his brows were contracted into a frown, and he would thus continue for hours together, silent and lost in thought.

In the course of their journey, in several towns and villages through which they passed, Frederick observed many houses bearing the oak-leaves and dagger as described by the old man, but as his vows prevented his ever becoming a member of that order he purposely avoided them, although repeatedly urged by his guide to the contrary.

On the sixth day after leaving the Castle of Farnsburg, as they had reached the summit of one of the frozen mountains which form the boundary of Switzerland, their eye wandered with delight over the vine-clad plains of Italy, and their hearts palpitated with joy when their guide, pointing to the gilded spires of a convent which were reflected on the bosom of a lake, cried, 'There dwell the objects of your search.' Urged by love they were pushing forward when the stranger stayed them saying: 'Deign to dedicate one moment to an unfortunate, who, a stranger to joy himself, cannot stay to witness yours. Say have you got the ring which the old man delivered to you?' 'We have,' said Frederick. 'Then,' continued the guide, 'you have only to strike three times upon the bell which you will find at the gate of the convent. The porteress will attend your summons, and the ring will do the rest. But, may I ask, does Maria of Neuenberg also go with you?'

'Certainly,' said Frederick. 'But in return may I inquire the cause of this question?'

'I only asked,' said the guide, 'because——because Eschenbach was not of the party——I have heard she is a lovely maid—that she possesses the gentlest heart—a soul which is the seat of purity and innocence.'

'You describe her well,' said Frederick; 'she is indeed a lovely maid and Eschenbach has an enviable lot—nor do I wonder that she was adored by her unfortunate mother.'

To Frederick's surprise the guide exclaimed: 'Ah, was she so?——No! by Heaven she never was——'

'Sir, you are mistaken,' said Frederick, 'and her filial affection makes me tremble for her life, if she has not yet heard the tidings of her wretched mother's fate, and we are destined to be the fatal harbingers.'

'For pity's sake, then, I implore you,' said the guide, 'do not tell her of it; at least let her remain ignorant of the manner of her death. Say that she died broken-hearted—Oh, grant me this, and I will bless your name!'

The knight replied: 'I promise then I will, although I confess I cannot guess the cause of this anxiety.'

'One little month,' said his companion, 'and you shall know all. Till then respect my secret, and when you shall see Maria, offer her the greetings of a wretched stranger. Tell her, [*wiping his eyes*]—Ah, another tear, I thought their sources had been drained, but it is the last that shall bedew these withered cheeks. One drop can grant but little refreshment to the burning Syrian Desert—such is this shrivelled heart. Farewell, gentle knights, in the name of God we shall meet again.'

He then darted his spurs into the sides of his horse, who, springing forward, flew off with the rapidity of an arrow.

The words and manner of their guide excited the greatest curiosity and sympathy in the knights, but the sight of the convent which they had now reached quelled every feeling but that of all-mighty love.

The door of the chapel was open, and a number of people were assembled in it, while the tolling of a bell seemed to announce some public office of religion.

Frederick felt a secret dread which he could not account for, and his hand trembled as he seized the bell to ring it. A lay sister answered the summons.

Frederick, according to the instructions of the old man, presented the signet, which she examined minutely, and then retired without uttering a word. The knights regarded as a

favourable omen her silence, which implied a knowledge of their errand, and an acknowledgment of their authority.

The slightest noise made them start, and stretch out their arms to catch the beloved objects of their affections.

At length they could distinguish the sounds of approaching footsteps, their hearts beat high, the bolts were withdrawn, but the unfortunate knights recoiled in horror, when, instead of their beloved mistresses, appeared a procession of monks, clad in mourning garments, and bearing lighted torches in their hands. They chanted a solemn requiem accompanied by the melancholy notes of the death-trumpets, and the whole was closed by a number of mourners bearing several coffins.

The fate of the Countess of Neuenberg flashed upon their minds. They thought that they had seen the last remains of all they held dear upon earth, and the cold damps of death hung upon their foreheads.

But they were soon roused from this horrid state. Well-known voices reached their ears, they looked up and beheld their affianced brides. They hailed a new existence, and in their beloved arms forgot every remembrance of their sorrows. Even Adelaide in the joy of their deliverance flew to support and comfort Lewis. Maria alone sought in vain for Eschenbach. In the midst of universal joy, she stood solitary and forsaken. In vain she multiplied and repeated her questions. No one had time to listen to her. At length she turned to the squires and received some little comfort in learning from them that Eschenbach at least lived and was in health.

With these assurances the unhappy Maria was obliged to be satisfied; but after they had proceeded some way on their return she approached Frederick and Clara, who were riding some distance before the others, and requested him to tell her what cause had delayed Eschenbach. Frederick assured her that business of the utmost consequence had alone been able to detain his friend, who waited her return with the most agonising impatience. Her next inquiry was for her mother, who had been separated from them immediately after they were carried from the Castle of Frohburg, and Frederick was

compelled to announce the dreadful intelligence, only concealing the manner of her death.

Maria shed many tears to the memory of a mother whom she had so tenderly loved, and her companions willingly resigned the pleasure of conversing with their knights to participate in her sorrows.

In the course of their journey, Frederick learned that the account given by the Black Knights was true, and that the fortress of Frohburg had been actually destroyed by the followers of Friedau and Dornegg, but that the corpse which they had imagined to be that of the Countess of Neuenberg was one of the knights who had fallen in the action with the freebooters.

The unhappy Countess, he learned, had been separated from the rest and carried off by some of the knights, unperceived by all except Clara, as they were passing through a forest.

The travellers had arrived within a few leagues of the Castle of the Lion when they were met by Eschenbach, who without saluting any of his friends advanced towards Maria; but when she would have thrown herself into his arms, he retired from her embrace, saying with a cold reserve: 'Maria, I had hoped not to find you in this society.'

'Why not,' cried the weeping Maria, 'in the society of your friends?'

'I could have wished not, but durst hardly expect it, and therefore awaited you to carry you back to that convent you should never have quitted.'

He then related to the trembling maid the dreadful circumstances attending her mother's fate. 'On her sacred grave,' continued he, 'I swore to avenge her troubled spirit. These knights have done the same, but in their own joys they have forgotten their vow and the sorrows of others.'

Frederick endeavoured to convince him that they had never for a moment neglected his interest, nor did the freedom of their mistresses prevent their vengeance, should the Countess be found to have suffered innocently. Eschenbach without seeming to listen to him insisted that Maria should

return to the convent, nor quit it till his arm had reached the murderers of her mother.

Frederick seeing his obstinacy reminded him that the statutes of the order required implicit obedience, and that Maria should remain under his protection in the Castle of the Lion.

'I had expected this, and thank you for it,' cried Eschenbach. 'I am saved from perjury, Maria is released, but her freedom has not been purchased by me, and I may now embrace her.'

During this contest, Maria overcome by so many painful feelings had fallen lifeless into the arms of Clara. Eschenbach approached, and seizing her hand cried: 'Awake, my beloved Maria, and bless me with one parting look; the hand that fondly presses you, shall never again meet yours till it has been stained with the blood of the murderers of your mother.' Without waiting her reply or listening to her trembling voice that would have called him back, Eschenbach vaulted into his saddle, and in a moment was concealed from their view. Several hours elapsed before Maria's weakness would permit them to proceed. The loss of her mother, the departure of her lover, overcame her weak frame, and she fell from one fainting fit into another. At length she assumed some degree of fortitude. She praised the stern virtue and determination of Eschenbach, and, recommending him to the protection of the Almighty, exerted all her strength to follow her friends.

I shall pass over in silence the scene of joyful meeting at the Castle, and hasten to relate more important events. In nine days after Frederick's return the old commander of the Black Knights arrived at the fortress of the Lion, and, as he announced himself to be the bearer of intelligence which would for ever silence all doubts of his justice, he was received with every mark of courtesy and respect.

In his suite Frederick also recognised their mysterious guide, and immediately ushered them into the great hall, where Count Farnsburg and all his knights waited to receive them.

The commander as he entered bowed to the company, but

said he would not offer his hand till he had proved himself deserving of the honour. He then requested that the old man who accompanied him might be allowed to speak; 'for,' continued he, 'in him you behold the accuser of Neuenberg's Countess, and I am ready to prove the truth of what he has now to deliver.'

The old man now stepped forward and began as follows:

'The task that devolves upon me is painful in the extreme, and I trust this noble assembly will pity an old soldier, whom sorrow has bowed to the ground; but the honour of myself and my companions in arms demands the sacrifice and I will fulfil it, though I should perish in repeating those dreadful sufferings, the bare remembrance of which harrows my soul.

'In me you behold all that remains of George of Eschenbach, the father of your friend and brother in arms—nay, do not start, reserve your wonder for more surprising things which I have yet to tell. His parent died in giving him birth, and in the first transports of my grief I vowed never to give him a stepmother, but to devote the remainder of my life to the service of the Blessed Cross. I had already placed its glorious badge upon my shield when chance introduced me to the Castle of old Rothweil. His lovely Matilda, the unfortunate Countess of Neuenberg, presented me the cup of welcome —ah how at that moment I cursed my rash vow, for I then felt that I loved for the first time!

'From that period peace was a stranger to my bosom. Her beauteous image was ever before my eyes, and even haunted my dreams; but why detain you with an account of my fatal love? Suffice it to say, our love was mutual and old Rothweil consented to bless our union.

'The memory of my vow was flung away, but the cross which I bore upon my shield obliged me to proceed to Palestine, and defer the consummation of my happiness for two long years.

'The winter passed but too rapidly. With the return of spring I was forced to bid adieu to Matilda, and hasten to Italy, from whence I was to take ship for the coast of Syria.

It had been settled that we should send frequent messengers to each other as long as I remained in Europe; and, before I had passed the frontiers of Germany, her first courier overtook me, and brought a balm for my wounds in the assurances of her unchangeable affection.

'On reaching Brindisi, fortune introduced me to a merchant who carried on an extensive trade with Joppa, by whose means our correspondence might be continued even after my arrival in Palestine; and I hastened to communicate to Matilda the happy discovery.

'At length we embarked; but we had scarcely reached the open sea when we were attacked by Saracen galleys. We were superior in point of number, but, unaccustomed to fight on that element, we were forced to yield and the greater part of our convoy taken. The galley in which I was fortunately escaped, and we got back to Brindisi, when my first care was to inquire if any letters had arrived from Germany since my departure. The following was presented to me, which, the friendly merchant informed me, had arrived the third day after we had put to sea.' The letter was now presented to the knights, and Frederick, who was well acquainted with the Countess of Neuenberg's writing, after closely examining it, declared it to be hers, and read aloud as follows:

'"The blessing of God be with thee, my beloved George. The wretched Matilda sends thee this wet with her tears, and the hope that it may reach thee ere thy departure can alone support her. My father once so good, so indulgent, has become the most ruthless tyrant. Yesterday he commanded me to think of thee no more, but to prepare to give my hand to the Count of Neuenberg, whose riches had dazzled the eyes of my parent.

'"It was in vain that I sank at his feet and implored for mercy. I could only obtain a delay of two months, and was forced to swear that at the end of that period I would accept the hand of the Count, should'st thou not appear.

'"I knew thy love for thy Matilda would make thee resign all other duties to rescue her from misery. My father must keep his word. According to the last dispatch, thou art not to

sail for fifteen days, and in fourteen at furthest my messenger promises to be at Brindisi. My prayers will follow him that he may yet find thee. O Eschenbach, my love, hasten to succour thy Matilda! Yet, should he not find thee—there's madness in the thought—should the two fatal months be passed ere this meets thy eyes—we must never meet again: thy Matilda will be the wife of another. Then pray that sorrow may soon lay her in her grave; and mayest thou fall on the plains of Palestine, that our souls may be united in a better world."'

'Ah!' exclaimed old Farnsburg when Frederick had ended, 'if the viper was concealed under such roses, she has indeed merited her fate.'

Her accuser proceeded: 'I will not delay you by describing my feelings on the receipt of this letter; but hope did not forsake me quite. I remembered that I had still twenty days. Palestine, the cross, my vow—all were forgotten. Five horses sank under me; but I continued my journey on foot when another could not be immediately procured. On the eleventh day I reached my own Castle; but the countenances of my steward and servants made me tremble. I however attributed it to their knowledge of Matilda's distressed situation, and, without making any inquiries, hastened to announce my arrival. I desired my faithful old steward to have my letter immediately dispatched and delivered secretly into Matilda's own hands.

'"Would you take my advice," said he, "you would not send this, as, after what has passed, it can be of no service."

'"Meddling dotard!" cried I, angrily; "obey my commands, and make no comment!" The old man retired, shaking his head, and but too soon returned with this fatal answer, which I must request Count Frederick to read aloud.'

The knight obeyed, and once more read the well-known characters of the Countess, to this effect:

'Oh, unhappy me! My last messenger, then, has never [illegible]thee. But why should I complain of what has pro- [illegible]another sight of my beloved? Be prudent, be [illegible]ny things have happened since we last met. Thy

return, if known, would involve us in the most dreadful misery. This night, when the sentinel from the watch-tower shall announce the midnight hour, meet me in that grove which has so often witnessed our vows of love. Then shalt thou know everything; only be cautious, let no one suspect thy return, and we may yet be happy."'

'Filled by alternate hopes and fears, I stole unperceived to the appointed spot. Matilda was already there. After the first moments given to tenderness and love, she told me that Neuenberg, disgusted by her continual coldness, had withdrawn his suit, but that old Rothweil had sworn that should I return regardless of the vow which bound me to the Crusade, he would immure his daughter in a convent for life.

'"You see," continued she, "that if we ever hope to meet again, this very night you must return to Italy." I promised to obey, but the idea of again parting from her was more than I could bear. . . . At length I tore myself from her arms, and that very moment commenced my journey to Italy. At the inn where I halted next morning, it for the first time occurred to me that I had set out totally unprovided with money. I returned therefore through bye-roads, and entered secretly into my Castle, dissatisfied with myself.

'My agitation was too great to escape notice, and my steward, while he gave me the gold which I required, said, "Pardon my presumption, my good lord, but may I inquire, had you learned all that has passed before you quitted Italy?"

'"To what do you allude?" cried I. "I do not understand you!"

'"The marriage of Count Neuenberg with your Matilda," cried the old man, "which took place two months back."

'"She, Neuenberg's wife!" cried I, "impossible! thou liest! I spoke to her myself in Rothweil's garden."

'"I doubt it not, for when I delivered your letter to her yesterday at Neuenberg, she grew pale and trembled, but, recovering herself, desired me as I passed her father's Castle to announce her intention of being there upon the following morning."

'The thought of Matilda false drove me to madness, but

my despair was still further increased when I learned that, far from having been compelled to wed, her father had vainly attempted to remind her of her engagement with me. She had laughed at his conscientious scruples, as she called them, and openly declared she had never really loved me!

'I received from my faithful domestic the fatal certainty of her perfidy, and that she had been actually married when she sent that letter which she had calculated I should only have received in Asia, and such must have been the case had not an avenging Providence brought me back to the shores of Brindisi.

'I again perused her perfidious letter, and shuddered when I reflected that she was another's at the moment I was requested to seek for death in the plains of Palestine, that our souls might be the sooner united in heaven. Had I given myself time to reflect I might have rejoiced at the escape from being united to such a fiend, but in the first moments of disappointed love my soul thirsted only for revenge, and I immediately dispatched a letter requesting her to grant me another interview.

'Whether my agitation had betrayed itself in my writing, or whether the consciousness of her own guilt had roused her suspicions, I cannot tell, but as I reached the place appointed for our interview, armed with a dagger, I was seized by five ruffians who dragged me to the ground. It was in vain I struggled. Matilda, who had been hitherto concealed, now approached and commanded the villains to do their duty and dispatch me. As she spoke one of them thrust his dagger into my bosom and I dropped to all appearance dead. When I recovered from the faint into which I had fallen from the loss of blood, I found myself in a pit, into which the murderers, believing that they had effected their purpose, had thrown me. The groans which I uttered attracted the notice of some knights, who with much difficulty dragged me out. As I felt extremely weak and frequently expressed a wish for a confessor, they carried me to a neighbouring convent. Believing my latter ending fast approaching I wished to prepare myself for death and made an ample confession; but the priest who

attended me refused to grant me absolution, unless I should promise to leave the care of vengeance to Heaven, and devote the remainder of my life, in case I should recover, to the service of the Church in warring against the infidels. Every care and attention was bestowed on me during several months, at the end of which, my wound having closed, I was able to leave my bed, and walk about the garden of the convent.

'Some knights of the order to which I now belong arrived about that time, and in consequence of the vow which I had made, I requested to be admitted into their society.

'On the night of my introduction I was asked if I had any wrongs to complain of, or any criminals to accuse, and desired to relate to what cause I owed my wound. My heart, still secretly attached to Matilda, whose infidelity and barbarity I had forgotten during my long confinement, would not allow me to accuse her, and I merely said that I had been waylaid by five troopers whom I did not know, one of whom had wounded me.'

'We afterwards discovered them by chance,' interrupted the old commander, 'but as none of them would confess their guilt or betray their companions, we condemned them to perpetual imprisonment.

'These were the wretches whom you discovered in the dungeon of St. Mary's Convent, little thinking that you were granting liberty to murderers and assassins; but just Providence did not allow them to enjoy that blessing, as I have learned they died almost immediately after they had confessed their guilt, and that they had been employed by Matilda of Neuenberg.'

The old knight now continued: 'As I had promised to my brothers-in-arms to remain in the Holy Land, never wishing to revisit a country where Matilda dwelt, I recommended my son to the care of some of my friends who promised to bring him up in the fear of God, and to take charge of his property.

'Arrived in Palestine, I sought for Death in the front of every battle, but he seemed to fly my approach. At last, having rushed into the midst of a column of the enemy, I was overpowered by numbers and taken prisoner. It was believed

that I had fallen in the field, and the report of my death having reached Germany, my son succeeded to my inheritance.

'After an irksome captivity of thirteen years I was rescued by the valour of the Christians, who found me in one of the dungeons of Gazza, when I was hailed as one rescued from the dead. The victory, however, to which I owed my deliverance had cost them dear, and I was ordered to hasten to Germany and endeavour to recruit our exhausted ranks.

'The remembrance of Matilda had never quitted me for a moment, and I now trembled at the thoughts of visiting the country which she inhabited, but I was forced to obey.

'I reached this country at the time of your quarrel with the Bishop of Constance, and was journeying towards Zurich, where a general meeting of our order was to be held, when fortune enabled us to save your brides from the hands of their gaolers. At a cottage in the forest where we halted for refreshment, I had opened the beaver of my helmet when a well-known voice exclaimed: "'Tis he, 'tis he! O Almighty and avenging God!" I turned and recognised Matilda. As with me, the hand of time had fallen heavily on her; sorrow had furrowed her polished brow, and tears dimmed the lustre of her eyes. But to me she was still the same. The tenderest compassion was my only feeling, and I approached her with the intention of speaking peace and comfort to her. Her companions were then at some distance, and had not witnessed her agitation, or heard her scream. But her own remorse and anguish baffled my design and drew from her the confession of that crime which I had so carefully concealed.

'"Avenging spirit of my murdered George!" she cried, "I know you come to strike my guilty heart."

'Her words, unfortunately, were overheard by some of the knights who crowded round us, while she still continued to accuse herself as my murderer.

'Our commander thought an investigation necessary, and, in spite of my prayers and remonstrances, carried her off by a bye-road which led through the forest. I guessed the consequence, and the thought overcame me. I who had borne without shrinking the horrors of a dungeon for thirteen years,

I who had courted Death under his most dreadful forms, felt my courage forsake me at the sight of a woman once so dearly beloved. I dropped senseless from my horse, and was carried to a forester's cottage, where I remained delirious for several weeks. When I recovered I learnt that all my fears had been realised, but I again swear I am totally innocent of the wretched Matilda's punishment. I had long forgiven her myself, and interceded with Heaven for her pardon—and I feel, that, were she now living, I could clasp her to this aged breast.'

'The sentiment does honour to your heart,' said the commander, 'but she deserved her fate.'

'She did,' said Farnsburg. 'Her repentance might have washed away her guilt in the eye of the Almighty, but the justice of this world required the shedding of her blood.'

The commander continued: 'The statutes of our order demanded the sacrifice, and I was forced to obey, but I must now proceed with the narration.

'When we parted from the rest of the ladies, we conveyed the widow to a neighbouring fortress. There I inquired into the particulars of her guilt. She confessed all that you have already heard and owned that Maria was Eschenbach's daughter.'

'Almighty God,' exclaimed Farnsburg, 'Thy ways are unsearchable. Then Eschenbach is the brother of Maria? Impossible! How could she have favoured so monstrous an alliance?'

'Judge for yourself,' said the commander. 'Here is a letter which she wrote immediately before her death, and bade me deliver to George of Eschenbach:

'"The justice of heaven, though long delayed, is certain even in this world. I have fallen into the hands of upright judges, and although Providence preserved thee from my dagger, I was guilty of murder in my heart, and I acknowledge the justice of the hand that is at this moment ready to strike me. Could I obtain thy forgiveness I should die resigned. One dreadful secret yet remains to be disclosed. Oh, hasten to

save the soul of thy once loved Matilda! Maria is your daughter; then fly to stop her dreadful union. I now see all the horror of my guilt. O God! if this should come too late! But no, I trust the Almighty will prevent the black deed. Farewell, and offer up a prayer for thy lost

"MATILDA."

'Unhappy Maria,' said Farnsburg, 'innocent victim of guilt, what is to become of her?'

Her father answered: 'She must mourn in a convent the guilt of her wretched parents, and I trust my poor Eschenbach may find a balm for his wounds in the discharge of his duties.'

The commander spoke again: 'My evidence is now closed, and it is for you to decide if I have succeeded in establishing my innocence.'

After some thought Farnsburg said: 'As on our present decision will in a great measure depend our future fate, I must request the opinions of the whole members of our order. Let such then as, like me, regard the Countess's fate as merited, lay their right hands on their swords.'

No one hesitated, and Farnsburg now embraced his guest as a friend, and renewed the promise that one half of his knights should accompany him to the Holy Land. The leader of the Black Knights thanked him, and, to prove himself not unworthy of the kindness, informed Farnsburg that he had already taken vengeance on those who had destroyed the Castle of Frohburg, and burned their fortress to the ground.

Early on the following morning the unfortunate Maria, already informed of her parentage, was removed to a distant convent, without being permitted to take leave of her friends, and almost immediately after her departure, Eschenbach, accompanied by his father, who had spent the night in endeavouring to reconcile him to his fate, arrived at the Castle. The deepest sorrow could be traced on his countenance, and it was with the utmost difficulty he could restrain his tears when the sight of his companions reminded him of

his loss; but he never inquired after Maria, or even mentioned her name, and as preparations were then making for solemnising the nuptials of his friends, he entreated his father to leave the fortress the following day.

'I cannot remain,' said he to Frederick. 'You must forgive me, and spare my feelings; but when you shall be ready to take the field, I will join you. I will willingly shed my blood for you, but I can never participate in your joys.'

Clara and the other women wondered greatly at the sudden departure of Eschenbach and Maria, but vague answers were only given to their repeated inquiries, with which they were obliged to be satisfied.

The Bishop of Constance, according to his promise, came to perform the ceremony. Adelaide and Lewis formed the fourth couple, and the magnificence with which the nuptials were solemnised could only be equalled by the bliss of the lovers.

The commander of the Black Knights also appeared upon this occasion, and brought with him some of his troops to guard the fortress, while all within might be expected to be immersed in revelry; a precaution for which the old Counts expressed their sense of gratitude, and the crafty leader seized this opportunity, when the heart of Farnsburg was warmed with joy and wine, to make him enter into a treaty offensive and defensive with his order, by which it was settled that the banner of the Lion should in future quarter an oaken bough, while that of the Black Knights should display a lion, couchant beneath an oak tree, with this motto, 'Rouse me not.' The joy of the Black Knights on gaining this point may be easily conceived, but old Farnsburg repented sorely on the following day of the rash promise which he had been induced to make in an unguarded moment.

Blessed in the full possession of their loves, our knights found the months of winter slide by unperceived. The more wildly did the storm rage without, the closer did they draw round their happy hearths; seated by the side of a beloved wife, they listened to her song while she turned her wheel and wrought at her loom.

The genial influence of spring was already felt, the armoury was once more thrown open, and the clashing of cuirasses and corslets reverberated painfully on the hearts of the women.

On the day of St. Philip and St. Jacob, the commander of the Lion summoned all his knights in their complete harness to the chapel. The priest officiated at the altar and read mass, imploring Heaven to grant them a prosperous voyage, and to shield them in the hour of battle. When service was ended, they adjourned to the great hall, and Farnsburg, ascending the rostrum, thus addressed them:

'My noble sons, you have fought gloriously till now, and your grateful country has often owned your protection, but you are now destined to extend that fame to a distant clime, and may you there acquire the renown which often conquers an enemy without the effusion of blood, for ere long I trust to see the name of the Lion make the Saracens tremble. Count Frederick of Frohburg, I here appoint you my representative and commander-in-chief. Take, then, this banner which never yet waved o'er a coward's head, and may eternal disgrace be the lot of him who returns without it. He shall be driven from our order, the scorn of the very slaves he used to rule. Should the Lord of Hosts deign to assist your arms, and should you be permitted to visit that spot which our blessed Saviour has sanctified for ever, remember me in your prayers; and now, with the blessing of God, I leave you to take the last farewell of your sorrowing wives. I will not name the hour of your departure, but you know your allies are even now expecting you in the valley. One word more ere we part. When you pass through Sicily, pay your respects to the young King Frederick, and tell him that all Germany looks to him as her future comfort. Once more then, my sons, I bid you adieu, and may the blessing of Providence attend you, and, should old Farnsburg never be destined to meet you again in this world, act so as to secure our sojourn in a better.'

Then stretched they their hands towards him saying: 'Farewell, venerable and beloved chief, trust in your sons who go to conquer or die.'

Lewis knelt and said: 'Father, grant me your blessing.'

'I gave it you,' said Farnsburg, 'when I blessed the others; they are all my sons, nor will I, like Isaac, keep a sweeter blessing for a favourite child. God be with you, my son—Frederick, he is my only one—the sole hope and stay of my family—should his ardour hurry him too far, cover him with your shield, preserve a child to thy old friend, a husband to thy sister. Farewell all. I do not blush at these tears which nature has forced from me; but go at once, I will retire to my apartment till you are gone, that I may gain strength to comfort those who have most need of consolation.'

The knights had yet a more painful duty to perform. For a moment the long stone passages resounded with their massive swords, as they sought their different apartments, the next a dead silence prevailed, only interrupted by the sobs of the mother and the wife.

Frederick was the first who opened the door of his chamber. He brushed the tear from his eye as he cast a last look on her who was soon to be a mother now lying senseless in the arms of her attendants. Love would have recalled him, but reason urged him to avail himself of her insensibility and thus spare her fresh pangs. He hastily closed the door and flying to the casement which looked into the courtyard commanded the trumpets to sound the signal of departure. Its notes were heard with horror, but they were obeyed. Agnes alone behaved with the utmost fortitude. Her eye shed no tear, and not a sigh escaped her lips, as she placed the helm on Henry's head and kissed his cheek for the last time. The knights congratulated him on having a wife endowed with such a command over her feelings, yet most of them thought that although the tears of a beloved object may be painful to bear, still there was a melancholy satisfaction in receiving such proofs of affection.

CHAPTER XVI.

Four times eighty of the bravest sons of the Lion joined their allies amounting to triple that number in the valley, and were received with the loudest acclamations of joy. They began their journey without delay, the Black Knights always leading the van, and providing accommodation in the houses, hostelries and convents that stood in bond with them, and everywhere they met with a warm reception and the most unbounded hospitality.

In passing a forest on the confines of Germany, Frederick, who was at the head of his troop, beheld a lady covered with a long veil, mounted on a black palfrey and attended by two squires, one of whom rode up and inquired if Count Henry of Frohburg was in his train, as a lady wished to speak with him. Henry was astonished, but immediately rode towards the lady, who, without speaking, dismounted from her horse and beckoned him to follow her into a more retired part of the forest, where, throwing back her veil, Henry with mingled surprise and delight recognised his Agnes. As he pressed her to his breast she informed him that he now saw the cause of her stoical behaviour at his departure.

'I come,' she said, 'to share your danger and your toils, nor shall any human power prevent my executing a resolution which I formed at the moment of our union.'

It was in vain Henry dwelt upon the dangers she must inevitably be exposed to so little suiting her age or sex. He was forced to yield on condition that Frederick should give his consent.

'Then I am satisfied,' cried Agnes. 'I have already secured his acquiescence, for, unable to behold the agonies

of Clara and my sisters, I made them companions of my secret flight.'

At this moment Frederick, astonished at his brother's delay, approached, and with surprise beheld him locked in the embraces of a woman. Yet was his wonder soon converted to delight when Clara, attended by Adelaide and Bertha, rushed into his arms. But however pleased Frederick might be, he felt it his duty to insist upon the women immediately returning. The arguments of Agnes, and the still more eloquent tears of Clara, however, conquered his resolutions, and he was obliged to acquiesce on condition that on reaching Palestine they should remain in the first town where they could be properly accommodated, and not think of following their lovers to the field, or encountering the horrors of the desert; while at the same time it was agreed that they should plead a sacred promise of visiting the Holy Land to account for their sudden appearance without shocking the prejudices of the Black Knights.

On reaching the main division of their little army the ladies were joyfully received by all the warriors, who promised to defend and support them on all occasions, and a messenger was immediately dispatched to the two old Counts to inform them of the safety of their daughters, and of their determination to proceed to Palestine.

The remainder of their journey was effected without danger or any incident worth mentioning; but on reaching Sicily they found that the vessels destined to convey them to Acre were not yet ready. Frederick was on the point of availing himself of this delay to pay his respects to the young King, when he was informed that a Sicilian habited as a page requested to be admitted.

'Noble knight of the Lion,' said the stranger as he entered, 'I greet you humbly; the fame of your order has often met my youthful ear, but never till now had I the honour of beholding what I have held up to myself as an object of imitation. I spent my earliest years in your country, and everything that is German still interests me nearly.

'I have heard that Philip owes his present power solely to the exertions of your order.'

'Boy,' said Frederick, 'would you wish to try the strength of your arm that you are so anxious in your inquiries?'

The page replied: 'Think not that I was interested in the praise I gave your order; I spoke but the effusions of my heart, for I am already employed in the household of King Frederick.'

'Forgive, gentle youth, my unjust suspicions; as an attendant on that Prince you are doubly welcome to me. How goes it with your master?'

'Hardly indeed,' said the page; 'his guardians, the Counts Zealano and Molesé, keep him under the severest control. They grant him the empty name of King, while they themselves usurp the power and squander the revenues of the crown. The Genoese have at length promised to assist him to throw off this irksome yoke, and furnish him with several galleys. I had come to learn if they were yet arrived, when I heard that you were here, and ventured in your presence.'

'But why does not your King,' asked Frederick, 'crave the assistance of the Germans?'

'Why should he look for succour when he has been openly rejected?' said the page. 'He was crowned King of the Romans while yet an infant, but the princes of the Empire have chosen his uncle Philip as their monarch, and your order has confirmed their choice.'

Frederick rejoined: 'If these are the sentiments of your young King, hasten to remove an error so prejudicial to the loyalty of his German subjects. They chose Philip, 'tis true, because in these times of anarchy, it required an experienced soldier to repress the haughty nobles, who would have ill brooked the feeble sway of a boy; but it was expressly stipulated, when the sceptre was delivered to him, that he held it only for the son of Henry, and I am even now commanded by our leader, the venerable Farnsburg, to offer to the youthful monarch our humble homage and to assure him that all Germany looks to him as towards her deliverer.'

The page said joyfully: 'Your intelligence will be most

grateful to the King, but I may take upon myself to say it had been yet more so if accompanied by the immediate offer of that assistance he so much needs.'

'Strange boy,' said Frederick, 'how am I to regard you? As a spy sent by the enemies of the King? if so, then tell them that the Knights of the Lion honour Frederick as their lawful sovereign, and vow deadly vengeance on his enemies; but, if you really come a messenger from my sovereign, assure him that he may dispose of me and mine as long as our duty permits us to remain in Sicily.'

'Oh, come to my heart, most generous of men! At length have I found that friend I have so long sought in vain,' cried the page. 'Nay, shrink not back. It is Frederick himself, it is your King, who would take you to his arms.' The knight now dropped upon one knee, but the King folded him in his embrace, saying: 'You shall be my friend—my father. I have this night eluded the vigilance of my guards and escaped from a fortress in the vicinity of Messina, hoping by means of my disguise to reach Genoa, and there display my standard.'

'Do not fly, my noble King,' said the knight; 'leave that to meaner souls. Show yourself openly to your subjects, and boldly assert your rights. 'Tis true you are not yet arrived at manhood, but the sentiments of the noblest inspire your soul and mark you for a throne. Command, then, my humble services; I know but to obey.'

The King replied, 'Secure of that, to-morrow's sun shall see me King. Molesé and Zealano are at this moment at their country palace sunk in debauchery. Their capture is easy, and in them alone are all my fears; they once in our power, the people will gladly acknowledge my authority.'

Frederick now craved the King's leave for a few minutes, that he might consult his companions as to the most effectual means of serving him. He accordingly summoned them together, and, ere he proceeded to act, thought it incumbent upon him to ascertain that the stranger with whom he had been conversing was actually the King, and not an impostor.

The commander of the Black Knights had frequently seen the youthful Frederick and declared that he should know him

again immediately, and earnestly requested that his forces might be permitted to assist, adding, with his usual foresight, that they might justly look forward to great rewards from the gratitude of the young monarch.

Frederick accepted his services, but at the same time disapproved of the evident selfishness which had actuated the offer. He however allowed the commander to accompany him to his tent, where he found the King, who smiled when he learned Frederick's suspicion, but thanked him most warmly when he heard that all the knights were ready to follow wherever he might lead them.

Placing himself at their head, he conducted them to the palace where he had left his guardians sunk in intoxication; but the news of his escape had reached them and dissipated the fumes of wine. They had by this time assembled a large number of their adherents, and were actually consulting on the best means of again securing his person, when Frederick sent to summon them either to lay their arms at the King's feet, or prepare for an assault. They chose the latter, and rushing from the palace at the head of their attendants endeavoured to cut a passage through the assailants. As they were desperate, the combat became furious, and ere the rebels could be overpowered, several of Frederick's companions were slain. The King himself must have perished under the blow of an immense club, when Frederick's shield protected him—an action which he never forgot, and which he found an opportunity of repaying to the order of the Lion many years afterwards.

The adherents of the two Counts now threw themselves at the King's feet imploring for mercy. He was pleased at length to grant them a general pardon for all former injuries on condition of their immediately taking the oaths of fealty and allegiance to him. Prostrate in the dust they praised the monarch's clemency and willingly took the oaths prescribed.

Zealano and Molesé alone stood with undaunted looks and refused to submit, when the King turning to them said:

'I was inclined to have included you in the general amnesty had you not thus sullenly refused to acknowledge my claims.

Justice now requires that you should remain my prisoners. You must return with me to the capital, and there give an account of the manner in which you have managed the revenues of the crown; and you, my noble friends, must still assist me to mount that throne on which my father so long sat with such honour to himself.'

As the signal for departure was about to be given, a maid, lovelier than the child of fancy, rushed from the palace and, falling at Frederick's feet, cried: 'O man devoid of pity! where is my unhappy father, and whither are you bearing him?' Frederick, raising her from the ground, desired her to address herself to the King, whom she had not immediately recognised in his present disguise. She now flung herself prostrate before the young monarch and, with uplifted hands and streaming eyes implored him to release her father. The King promised that if the Count should be found to have done his duty during the period of his regency he should be immediately set at liberty, and in the meantime at her earnest request permitted her to accompany her father to the capital.

As it was late in the day before all their arrangements were made, they found it impossible to reach Messina that night, but were obliged to content themselves with such accommodation as they could find in the huts of some fishermen. Frederick, but little disposed to sleep, was watching the tardy progress of the waning moon at the door of one of the hovels when Adelgunda—for such was the name of the lovely maid—begged for a few minutes' private conference on the part of her father, Count Zealano. Frederick received her with the respect due to her sex, and the filial duty which she said had prompted this untimely visit. But the indignant knight's anger may be easily conceived when in the name of her father and Count Molesé she offered him an immense reward if he would permit their escape. Observing the tears which fell from her eyes at his apparent fury, he said: 'It is not with you, lovely Adelgunda, that I am irritated; but go tell your father that were he not a prisoner nothing but his blood could wash out this affront, and let him know that gold has no charms for a son of the Lion.'

Finding all her entreaties vain, Adelgunda, after a few minutes spent in silent reflection, during which the roses which fled from her cheeks for a moment only to return with a double glow seemed to denote some violent internal struggle, at length threw back a long veil which had hitherto concealed her charms, and discovered to the eyes of Frederick a face which the recollection of Clara alone could have prevented his worshipping. She observed the effect her beauty seemed to have had upon the knight, and clasping his knees with one arm, while with the other she covered her face, asked him, if he thought her father's liberty would be too cheaply purchased by the possession of her love. The hectic glow that passed across her lovely countenance, and the trembling accents in which these words were uttered, proved to that Frederick the desire for a father's freedom and no other feeling had produced the offer which made him shudder. But unable to conceal his secret indignation he turned aside, while with his hand he waved her to begone.

She saw his sentiments in his manner, and, burning with shame and remorse, cried: 'Then will I hasten to the King; he will not resist like thee.' Saying this she darted from the hovel, leaving Frederick to ponder over the strange nature of a disposition at once so amiable, and yet so ready to plunge into guilt from a mistaken idea of duty.

Unconscious of the lapse of time, he continued to meditate till the dawn of day, when the King was announced, who said he came to consult Frederick on the propriety of a measure, which at the present moment he thought highly advisable.

He had received accounts from Messina, he continued, which stated that his escape from his two guardians had been received with every demonstration of joy, but that the populace seemed to be so enraged against his tyrants, that he feared in the first transports of their fury they might tear the Counts to pieces.

'I know,' said he, 'noble knight, that your valour will defend them, but yet I fear it cannot be done without bloodshed, and too much has already been spilled in my service;

and, greatly as Zealano and Molesó have injured me, I should tremble to see them exposed to the fury of a savage mob. Under my father's reign they were held in great esteem, and I would therefore wish to permit them to escape, on condition of their promising never again to return to Sicily.'

'Sire,' said the knight, 'had you come with this proposal a few hours ago, I should have said "Hail to the country governed by a King who seeks to reign by clemency"; but now I say "Woe to that country whose ruler yields to the seduction of beauty." Forgive me, my Liege, for daring thus to speak, but you have honoured me with the name of father, and that sacred title has called from me a harsh truth, for your burning cheek and downcast eye tell me I have guessed but too well——'

The King throwing himself in Frederick's arms exclaimed: 'Be still my father, my only friend. Thank God, I have not yet forfeited my title to that name, although the unbridled passion of youth and a secret inclination, which I have long though vainly combated, for Adelgunda had conducted me to the edge of the precipice; but now I will show myself worthy of your protection, and act from noble motives only—then say, how can I best reward the filial affection of Zealano's daughter?'

His new friend answered: 'Your own generous heart needs no prompter.'

'Well then,' said the King, 'her father is free. Let him only avoid this land; but go you, my friend, and announce it to Adelgunda. Alas! I feel I am yet too young in virtue to trust the siren's voice.'

A ready response came: 'Royal youth, I go. This action alone has proved thee worthy of the crown.'

Frederick now hastened to the lovely maid, whose gratitude knew no bounds. A thousand times did she call him the saviour of her father's life, the protector of her honour, and, while she implored a thousand blessings on his head, hastened to communicate the glad tidings to her father.

Frederick conducted the two Counts and their lovely pleader on board a small felucca which was to convey them

over to the shores of Italy, on condition of a considerable sum of money which the padrone received from Frederick.

As soon as the vessel which conveyed the fugitives was out of sight, Frederick returned to the King, who soon after proceeded towards Messina, where he was received with universal acclamations of joy. The streets through which he passed were strewed with flowers; triumphal arches (hastily erected) were placed in the great square; while the women shouted blessings from the open balconies, as the procession passed. Frederick and his knights were treated with the utmost magnificence in the palace, and the young monarch endeavoured by every argument to detain them, or at least induce them to leave the ladies till their return. But this the latter positively refused to do, and, as the vessels were now arrived, Frederick insisted upon proceeding up the Levant while the season continued favourable.

Finding them determined upon proceeding, the young monarch endeavoured to evince his gratitude by furnishing their galleys with every species of luxury, and, accompanying them to the shore, assured them that he should never forget the obligations he owed to the order of the Lion.

CHAPTER XVII.

THEIR voyage proved perfectly favourable, without danger or alarm, and in less than a month they beheld with infinite joy the white shores of Palestine, while a rising enthusiasm pervaded their breasts as about to tread a land sanctified by the blood and sufferings of our Redeemer, for whose glory they were now to exert their courage and probably sacrifice their lives.

As soon as their galleys entered the Port of Acre, a number of Crusaders who had already been assembled here for some time came down to the shore to greet this powerful reinforcement to their army, and rejoiced when they saw that the brave knights of the Lion had accompanied their brethren of the Black Order. The Templars in particular, anxious to show their high estimation of the assistance of such men, offered to resign the fortress of Dock in that neighbourhood for the accommodation of the ladies, as Acre, in the midst of military preparations and crowded with soldiers from all nations, was by no means an eligible residence for women.

They were accordingly removed to Dock on the following day, where a number of guards and attendants were left for their service and safety, so that their knights were enabled to leave them with some comfort, satisfied as to their present security. They then hastened back to Acre where Emeric of Lusignan, King of Jerusalem, had by this time arrived to crave the assistance of all the Crusaders.

Sultan Sapphadin at this period wielded the sceptre of the East, though with a feebler grasp than that of his predecessor, the great Saladin, the most powerful enemy the Christians had ever had to oppose. Fond of the pleasures of

his harem, he no sooner ascended the throne than he granted a truce to the Christians, which was, however, but of short duration. Some vessels belonging to Emeric had, in defiance of the truce, been captured off the coast of Cyprus by an Egyptian Emir, and the King of Jerusalem now hastened to Acre to claim the assistance of the Crusaders and endeavour to surprise the Sultan in Damascus, where he was plunged in all the effeminate and voluptuous luxuries of the East. Had union dwelt in the Christian army, this plan might have succeeded; but discord had already begun to manifest itself among the different leaders, and ere they could agree on their plan of attack these intentions were fully known in the seraglio of Damascus, and the most active measures taken for its defence.

At length, however, a day was fixed for their march. Frederick and his companions bade adieu to their wives, promising to furnish them with constant intelligence from the field by means of some carrier pigeons, which were to bear different coloured pieces of ribbon, to announce the nature of their tidings, when time would not admit of writing.

Towards the middle of August the army of the Crusaders, amounting to 13,000 foot, and 4,000 horse, under the command of Emeric, marched from Acre.

The campaign opened in the most brilliant manner on the part of the Christians.

Ere a month had elapsed the towns of Canna, Nazareth, and Sichem had yielded to their arms, and the fair ones at Dock often hailed the return of their pigeons bearing the white ribbon.

But Corradin, the son of Sapphadin and Governor of Jerusalem, beheld with indignation the richest provinces of his father overrun by a handful of Christians, before whom the crescent fled in every direction; and, without consulting the Sultan or waiting for his assistance, resolved to stem the torrent or perish in the attempt. He immediately issued orders to the neighbouring sheiks and rulers, and in a few weeks found himself ready to take the field.

Emeric, apprised of his approach, determined to wait his

attack in his entrenchments which were defended by a mountain on each side and a deep morass in front, but his infantry, which were composed of mercenary troops collected from various parts of the coast of the Mediterranean, and whose sole object was plunder, assembled round his tent in the most tumultuous manner and insisted upon his marching towards Cesaria, as had been his original intention, in the hopes of intercepting a convoy of ships richly loaded from the Red Sea.

Sensible of all the danger to which his army must be exposed by quitting their present advantageous situation, Emeric found himself compelled to yield, and soon experienced that his fears had been but too well founded. The Christian army had advanced to within a few leagues of Cesaria, where in passing through some defiles in the mountains they found themselves surrounded on all sides by the troops of Corradin. To retreat or advance was alike impossible. The Persian troops rested for some time like a thick cloud on the summit of the hills, and then descended with the impetuosity of a tornado, sweeping all before them with a whirlwind of cavalry. The mercenaries fled on all sides, and by their confusion prevented the cavalry from acting with effect, or forming a phalanx to oppose the enemy. Emeric, assisted by the Knights of the Lion and a few of the allies, determined to make a last stand and at least sell their lives as dear as possible. The knights dismounted from their horses and formed a compact body round the person of the King. In this situation they withstood the charge of the cavalry, and, although they beheld their ranks mowed down by the Persian scimitars, they yielded not an inch of ground.

Frederick, however, finding that it would be impossible long to resist the increasing numbers of the enemy, extended the wings of his little column towards the mountains, so as to cover the flight of Emeric, and he and a few of his attendants determined to perish themselves sooner than turn their backs upon a foe.

Corradin, who, though born in a seraglio, possessed all the bravery and humanity of a hero, astonished at the valour of this little phalanx, ordered a cessation of arms, promising

quarter to such as chose to deliver up their swords. This proposal the Knights of the Lion rejected with the utmost scorn, but at length, covered with wounds, they fell, and among the number, Frederick and Henry, whose swords dropped from their nerveless grasp, as they sank insensible from the loss of blood. Corradin approached the prisoners, and after commanding that none of them should be put in chains, but that every possible means should be used for their recovery, lifted the sword of Frederick from the ground and kissed it saying: 'Had I but one hundred heroes such as he who wielded this, I should ere long sit unmolested on the throne of Persia.'

Neither Frederick nor Henry deigned to reply to a remark which was evidently intended for them, but a tear of burning shame bedewed their cheek when they beheld the sword of the Lion in the hands of an infidel. Corradin saw and admired their feeling.

'I could have wished to converse with you,' said he, 'but I see the loss of liberty is still too new for you; yet rest assured I will do all in my power to soften its rigours.'

Then turning to his followers he ordered that the knights should be conveyed to Cesaria and every care taken of their wounds, while they themselves should be treated with every mark of the highest distinction.

The Christian army being entirely routed, King Emeric fled towards Acre, where he hoped to find such of his troops as had escaped the swords of the enemy, while Corradin, whose victory, although complete, had been purchased by the loss of the best of his veterans, resolved to follow up the blow, and endeavour to destroy the whole of the Christians before they had time to form a junction, or recover from the dismay into which their unexpected defeat had thrown them.

With this intention he dispatched his light troops in pursuit of the fugitives, to whom no quarter was granted, and, in the course of a few days, the crescent was once more displayed on the walls of Canna, Nazareth and Sichem. Only one hundred of the Black Knights and about thirty of the order of the Lion, among whom were Lewis and Weisenborn, escaped the exter-

minating sword of the Saracens and reached the fortress of Dock, which had for some time past been a scene of sorrow.

The pigeons returning with black and red ribbons after the unfortunate battle near Cesaria had announced death and bloodshed, and prepared their unhappy mistresses for those dreadful truths, which were but too soon confirmed by the fugitives who announced the total destruction of the cavalry.

Clara and Bertha had shortly before that period given birth to two fine boys, and, while they gazed on them with tears of maternal affection, had anticipated with rapture the moment when they should present them to their victorious fathers.

How dreadful, then, must have been their situation on receiving this awful intelligence! Agnes alone supported herself with some degree of fortitude, and endeavoured to console her sisters by inspiring them with the hopes that their husbands might be still living. Bertha and Adelaide beheld these hopes realised when Lewis and Weisenborn reached the fortress, though almost sinking under their wounds. But it was in vain that Clara and Agnes sought their husbands among the number. They listened to every step, trembling to risk an inquiry that might only realise their utmost fears; but Agnes, unable to endure the agony of suspense, resolved to learn the worst, and, seizing the hand of Lewis, in a trembling voice demanded: 'Where is my Henry, where is Frederick?' Lewis, unable to reply, turned away in silence to conceal a starting tear. Clara saw it and sank senseless to the floor, but Agnes, almost raving with despair, insisted upon knowing more. Lewis was therefore obliged to confess that he had seen neither of them since the commencement of the action, and that there was but too much reason to fear they had fallen in the field.

Agnes in the wildness of her despair upbraided him with cowardice in having abandoned his friends to seek his own safety in flight.

'Your loss, Agnes,' replied Lewis, 'entitles you to every commiseration, but does not entitle you to calumniate a brother's honour. Behold these wounds, and these, and say

if such are the badges of a coward. Your suspicions have wounded me to the heart, but I forgive them. We were beset in a narrow defile by surprise, and when we would have closed our ranks and opposed a front to the coming storm, our base mercenaries broke through our ranks, and separated the small troop to which I was attached from the main body of our cavalry. Each knight was now obliged to oppose himself singly to hundreds of the enemy. I was borne down by a score of their pikes, and forced with my horse into a torrent, when one of their lances, penetrating through the openings of my coat of mail, pierced my side, and I sank backwards into the waters, where I must have perished had not my horse dragged me to the opposite side hanging by the stirrups. Here, as I have since learned, I was found by some of my own troopers, who removed me from the scene of action in the intention of burying me, believing me to be dead. I however by degrees recovered my senses, and the first use I made of them was to insist upon returning to the field, but I learned that the contest was already over, that Emeric had effected his escape with a few followers, and that the rest after a dreadful struggle had fallen under the sabres of the infidels, and perished to a man.'

'O Lewis,' wept Agnes, 'forgive your unhappy sister! You have indeed fought nobly—but my Henry! Is there no hope left? Might not he and his brother be among the number of those who escaped with the King?'

Lewis caught at this last glimpse of hope, and offered to set off instantly for Acre to learn every possible tiding. His proposal was gladly accepted by Agnes, who now endeavoured to revive Clara, struggling for her sake to conceal her own feelings.

One of the knights who had accompanied Lewis observed that sorrow began to cloud the countenance of Adelaide at the thought of so soon losing his society, and therefore begged that he might be permitted to go to Acre in search of intelligence, with which he promised to hasten back, whatever might be its nature. Adelaide thanked him for his generous offer, and he departed amid the prayers of the women for his safety

and speedy return; gladly indeed would they have accompanied him, but Lewis would not permit them to run the hazard of falling into the hands of the enemy who with flying parties were scouring the country in every direction.

Night was fast approaching, and yet no accounts of their messenger had arrived. The women imagined everything their worst fears could portray from his long absence, and their anguish was still increased when the guards announced that they could discern the gleaming of arms in the valley and plainly hear the sounds of warlike tumult. Lewis hastened to mount the ramparts, and found the report accurate, though he could not distinguish whether they were Saracens or Christians who approached.

They watched with the utmost impatience for the dawning of day, but a thick fog still prevented their distinguishing any object. At length the powerful influence of the sun dispelled the mist and discovered to the anxious eyes of the inhabitants of Dock a body of Saracen cavalry amounting to several thousand, who had already invested the fortress on all sides, and seemed prepared to besiege it in due form. Lewis instantly summoned every inhabitant of the place who was capable of bearing arms, and found that their number, including squires, did not exceed 215. It was however unanimously resolved to make a brave defence. The fortress was situated on the summit of an insulated rock whose sinuosities it followed in every direction so as to leave no footing whatever beyond the walls. One small winding path alone led to the sole entrance which was defended by three drawbridges and a portcullis.

This difficulty of access gave some encouragement to the knights, who flattered themselves they might hold out till succour should reach them from Acre. While they were still deliberating, the sound of a trumpet summoned them to the walls, from whence they perceived a troop of the enemy approaching with a flag of truce. In the front appeared a Greek prisoner who acted as interpreter, and, on approaching the walls, offered in the name of the Saracen leader that they should all be permitted to leave the fortress on condition of

delivering it up with all the treasures it might contain upon the following day into the hands of the enemy.

This proposal, tempting as it might appear, since it would have secured the safety of the women, was however rejected. It would have but ill accorded with the valour or sense of duty of such men to have surrendered into the hands of infidels a quantity of consecrated plate belonging to the Church, besides the treasures of the Templars.

'Tell those who sent thee,' cried Lewis to the Greek, 'that this fortress is occupied by men who despise that freedom which is purchased at the price of honour; and that death, accompanied by glory, will be hailed by them as a friend; and that their little citadel can only be bought by their fall.'

The Saracens, having received this answer, lowered the flag of truce and hastened back to the valley. Enraged at their defiance, the infidels immediately prepared to storm the place.

During two days they renewed their attacks, and, although the fosses were filled with their dead, their number seemed still to increase, and their fury to redouble. On the coming of the second day the besieged were appalled by the acclamations which rose from the valley.

Sultan Corradin had arrived at the camp, but on the following day the besiegers retired from before the fortress, and seemed to have abandoned their attack. The knights employed this treacherous calm in reckoning their slain, and repairing the breaches which had been made in the walls.

Fifty brave Christians had fallen in the course of the two days, besides many more that were wounded. Still the attack was not renewed, though the number of the Saracens seemed daily to increase, and every avenue to the Castle strictly guarded.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THIS state of inactivity continued for ten days. On the eleventh the steward of the fortress presented himself to the knights with a countenance of the utmost horror, and announced that the only fountain of water within the walls was suddenly dried up. They flew to ascertain the dreadful truth, and found that it had not been occasioned by accident, but must have been cut off by the enemy. Not a drop of water in the fortress! and at that season of the year when the slighest moisture could not be expected from the clouds of heaven.

The quantity of wine was next examined, and found to be barely sufficient for a fortnight. The knights agreed, however, to reserve it for the use of the women and the sick, and never to allow a drop to themselves till exhausted nature should absolutely demand it. Yet all their resolutions could not diminish the horrors of the situation. Before three days had elapsed, the horses and every living animal languished. No food could be dressed for themselves without water, and wine was but ill calculated to allay a raging thirst, which it tended rather to increase.

But what pen can describe the agony of the mother when Bertha and Clara were doomed to witness the expiring struggles of their innocent babes, who stretched out their little hands in search of that nourishment which the breasts of their drooping mothers could no longer afford them. The sight struck to their hearts like the steel of the assassin, but when the Angel of Death at length closed their eyes, and the Almighty reclaimed His precious gift, the grief-stricken

mourners sought for consolation in the arms of religion, and resigned them to the earth without a murmur.

In this dreadful state a whole month was dragged on. Famine and death spread their sable wings over the fortress, but not a sound of repining was heard within its walls. The limited supply of wine, in spite of every care, was reduced to one small cask, which the knights determined to preserve exclusively for the use of the females, and then retire themselves into some secret part of the building, and perish unseen. The attentive and tender anxiety of Adelaide and Bertha could not be thus deceived. They soon perceived the dreadful state to which the knights were reduced, and on their knees implored them to yield to necessity, and, having already done all that was given to mortals to do, display the banner of peace from the walls.

'No!' cried these, 'we have learned to die, but can never stoop to beg a life, that under such terms were not worth possessing. There is yet a small remnant of the wine; use it sparingly, and perhaps succour may yet arrive from Acre in time to save you. But if not, and if the Almighty has doomed our bones to whiten on these sands, when we are gone you may implore the mercy of these infidels, as you are bound by no sacred oaths.'

In vain the prayers of a sister or a wife endeavoured to wean them from their stern purpose. With contracted brows and stern set lips they refused to yield. One only desperate means was left, and that the women hesitated not to adopt. They peremptorily refused to taste the wine, and Agnes, more determined than the rest, flew to the vessel and poured its contents upon the pavement, crying: 'Now the contest is over, and if you are determined on death, we at least will share your fate.' The unhappy warriors beheld the deed with mingled admiration and horror, and, recommending them to the help of God, hastened away to conceal their emotions. Awful indeed were the scenes which followed. The wretched sufferers would frequently fling themselves on the sand in hopes it might be moistened by the night dew, while they fervently prayed for the moment of dissolution.

On the morning of the third day, Weisenborn, feeling the hand of death press heavy on him, and expecting never to behold the dawn of another, determined to exert his remaining strength and indulge himself in the melancholy luxury of bidding a last farewell to a beloved object whose sufferings he had hitherto wished to spare by concealing his own gradual decay. With the utmost difficulty he dragged himself to her apartment, and sank down by the couch on which she lay nearly insensible. The sight of Weisenborn for a moment roused her to animation like the gleam that sometimes shoots from the expiring fire. One solitary tear rolled down her cheek and its moisture seemed to revive her parched lip. The sight was too much for Weisenborn, his frenzy supplied the place of strength. He wildly exclaimed: 'I cannot be the murderer of such angelic softness,' and, hastening from the apartment as fast as his enervated limbs would permit him, seized the signal of capitulation and displayed it from the battlements. Its white bosom fanned the morning breeze, and a troop of Saracens galloped up the hill.

In the front the regal turban, blazing with precious stones, proclaimed the Sultan Corradin, who, having been educated by a Christian slave, spoke the European languages with fluency. He thus accosted Weisenborn:

'Christian, are you prepared for an unconditional surrender, for to no other will I listen? I have long witnessed your sullen resistance, and had I not sworn by our holy Prophet that this petty fortress should not cost another drop of the blood of the faithful, it should ere now have been levelled with the dust. But exhausted nature, I find, has saved my trouble, and at this moment you are probably the only being who has strength to speak.'

Weisenborn feebly replied: 'Ah, learn to know a Christian soldier better. Had I alone survived, my last feeble efforts should not have been employed in begging mercy of an infidel; but alas! I have a wife—a dear one too. If you have one spark of generous feeling, the purity of her affection must arouse it. Know, barbarian, this wonder of her sex has followed my fortunes, and shared my dangers. Her lovely

limbs, formed solely for the tender offices of love, have borne the hardships of this siege, and must I now behold her perish for want? She gave me one lovely pledge of our affection—he perished—I looked upon his grave without a tear, but I feel I cannot see her die. Swear then by your God that you will grant immediate succour to her and the other women, that you will permit them to return to Acre unmolested, and my last feeble strength shall be exerted in throwing open the gates.'

'Christian,' said the Sultan, 'you forget that you are my prisoner when you would thus prescribe your terms.'

'The treasures which this place contains will more than repay their ransom, and satisfy your utmost avarice. Have pity then—he who never yet bent his knee but to his God implores your mercy,' replied the Christian.

'You sue in vain—yet a few days and all must be mine without conditions,' answered in scorn the cruel Corradin.

'O barbarian, devoid of pity!' groaned the knight.

A thought struck Corradin. 'Say, Christian, are you one of those who lately fought against me near Cesaria?'

'I am.'

'Let me then see the handle of your sword,' said Corradin. 'I'm satisfied; for the sake of that sword I will be merciful and grant your prayer.'

'Swear, then, to yield the women every succour, and to set them free.'

'Learn, Christian, that the word of Corradin is equal to a thousand oaths.'

Weisenborn retired to open the gates, but in a few minutes appeared again upon the ramparts saying he had not strength to remove the massive bars, and therefore desired the Saracens to scale the walls, which none of his companions were then in a situation to oppose had they wished it. He even ventured to request that the Sultan would generously promise to grant them also their liberty, but Corradin, while he consented to yield them every assistance which their necessities required, declared that they must continue his prisoners.

'Then,' cried Weisenborn, 'to save my Bertha I have

sacrificed my honour, and become a traitor to my order. I have sold my brave friends to a ruthless enemy, and embittered their last moments by a shameless captivity. But behold how a Christian soldier punishes his own infamy.' As he said this, he placed the handle of his sword against the rampart, and, falling upon it, sank at the feet of Corradin, and expired without a groan.

The Sultan gazed upon the body for some time with the deepest sorrow and contrition, while he exclaimed, 'Had I foreseen this, I should have acted otherwise.' Then grasping the inanimate hand of Weisenborn he continued, 'All who are yet living in the fortress shall be free; receive this, noble stranger, as an atonement, and let not your soul accuse me before the throne of the Most High.' Then turning to his followers, he said, 'Within these walls which have witnessed his glory and his fall shall the hero be interred, and over his body will I raise a monument, which shall serve as an example to you and stimulate your deeds to equal his.'

Having ordered water and refreshments to be brought from the camp, the Sultan commanded his janissaries to scale the ramparts. Alarmed at the noise, ten knights who yet survived raised themselves upon their elbows, and attempted to draw their swords. The effort was vain, and they again sank upon the earth.

When the gates were thrown open Corradin hastened to the apartments of the women, who, terrified at his appearance, attempted to fly, but their exhausted limbs refused their office.

'Fear not,' said he in a voice at once tender and respectful, 'I come as a friend; I come to offer you refreshment and liberty. Enjoy then the first with moderation, that you may be the sooner capable of using the latter;' and without waiting to receive their thanks he retired, and ordered slaves for their attendance.

On searching for the remains of the little garrison, he found that they had been already conveyed into the hall, where his people were employed in administering to their wants. Seeing that they had suffered even more than the

women, he recommended the greatest caution to be used in quenching their thirst. Lewis, who was among the survivors, heard his injunctions and looked up to Corradin with surprise and gratitude. The Sultan approached him, and seeing by his armour he was one of those knights whose valour he so highly honoured, informed him that the women and he where at liberty to retire when and where they pleased, but refused at this moment to explain the cause of his clemency. As soon as his strength would permit, Lewis hastened to communicate the glad tidings to Adelaide, and was followed by the Sultan, who with a graceful smile raised the lovely sufferers who had thrown themselves at his feet to express their sense of gratitude. Bertha now ventured to inquire for Weisenborn, and begged Corradin's permission to go in quest of him, as her joy must be imperfect till shared with him.

The Sultan granted her request, but as she left the apartment his foreboding heart told him that the object of her search was he for whose fate the tear still moistened his cheek, and walked towards the casement unable to conceal his emotion.

No one dared to interrupt the silence which now followed till Bertha staggered into the room with wild and distracted looks. With all the energy of despair she upbraided Corradin as the murderer of her husband.

'Unhappy lady,' answered he, 'I had expected this, and can excuse thy sorrow; but may the malediction of the blessed Prophet light upon my head, and may eternal infamy attend my arms, if I be guilty of thy noble husband's death.'

He then related all that had occurred, and concluded, addressing Bertha, 'Thy tears, lovely Christian, were just, but if one other dims thine eye, thou art not worthy of such a hero.'

'You are right,' replied Bertha, as she wiped her swollen eyes. 'He has died a noble death, and a daughter of Farnsburg should not repine; but while I glory in the hero, I feel I must ever weep over the husband.' Then covering her face, she left the apartment.

Clara would have followed, when her eye was on a sudden rivetted on Corradin; the blood forsook her cheeks, she trembled and averted her head. Then, seeming to recall her courage, she requested to examine his sword. She had no sooner touched it than, shrieking in horror, she cried, 'Tis his, it is my Frederick's—then he is no more, for this sword and he could never have parted in life.'

The Sultan comforted her with the assurance that Frederick lived, though wounded and a prisoner. Agnes also learned, to her inexpressible joy, that Henry still survived, and they even obtained permission to join their husbands, either at Cesaria or Jerusalem, to share and soften their captivity, as Corradin could not be persuaded to grant their liberty.

To Lewis and the other knights who survived in Dock the Sultan granted unconditional liberty.

'Generous Corradin,' answered Lewis, 'ere you decide, I feel it my duty to tell you that, if left at full liberty, I must join our standard at Acre, where I am summoned alike by duty and inclination. You have it therefore still in your power to recall what you were in no wise bound to grant, but if your generosity should still permit us to depart, we must follow the dictates of our duty. We must appear where honour calls, and oppose against you in the field that life your generosity has preserved, or else coward-like live in the contempt of our brave companions. But, thank God, the gate through which the noble Weisenborn has passed is open; yet should your prince-like clemency still say "be free," the deed shall be engraved upon my heart, nor shall I dare to wield this sword against you till fortune shall have enabled me to discharge the debt of honour.'

'Go then,' cried Corradin, 'and should the fortune of war smile on your valour, remember the fortress of Dock, and be merciful.' Thus saying, he crossed his hands upon his breast in token of salutation, and hurried from the fortress unwilling to listen to their thanks.

The wretched Bertha expressed a desire to accompany Adelaide and Lewis to Acre, but the energy which had

hitherto supported them being no longer called upon, a fortnight elapsed before they found themselves able to undergo the fatigues of travelling, and of the ten knights who had survived till the period of the capitulation eight only ultimately recovered. Meanwhile the Sultan took care that they should be supplied with every necessary and even luxury which they could require. He frequently visited them, and spent whole hours in familiar conversation with the women, to whom he confessed that his heart was no stranger to the passion of love, although (he added with a sigh) he had hitherto only found the thorns without being able to pluck the rose.

On the day fixed for their final departure, Corradin appeared with a numerous escort destined to protect them on their march.

'I will not take leave of you,' said he, addressing himself to Agnes and to Clara, 'as I hope ere long to see you at Jerusalem; but you' (turning to the rest) 'I shall probably not meet for a great while—at least as friends. Acre makes a gallant defence; its port is once more free, and a fleet returned to it after having pursued a squadron of my father's as far as Sidon. I am not the author of this war, so the blood which is spilt in it cannot weigh on my conscience; and, though I cannot dread its consequences, yet if your countrymen are inclined to show the olive branch, I will do all in my power to promote a cessation of arms. I understand your reason for invading us is that this land contains many spots which you regard as sanctified by the God whom you adore, and in which you wish to worship him; then let it be known to all the Christians that a free passage shall be granted to such as come unarmed to prostrate themselves at the tomb of their Lord.

'In your train you will find some camels laden with the vases which were found in this fortress. Gold has no charms for me, nor will I profane what you regard as holy. The God to whom they are consecrated is also mine, and when you shall present your offerings in these vases at the altar, remember Corradin.'

The noble youth now quitted the little troop, who were deeply affected by his generosity and candour, which they had

little expected. Agnes and Clara parted from their companions with heavy hearts, and were attended by a powerful escort, and a number of mutes who rode by their sides ready to obey their commands. On reaching Cesaria they learned by their interpreters that their husbands had been removed to Jerusalem. Impatient to join them, they left Cesaria early on the following morning, and soon reached Emmaus, where they wished to visit the spot where our Blessed Saviour had appeared to his apostles.

The tents which they carried along with them were pitched under the shade of some fig-trees, and they were preparing to partake of a slight refreshment when they beheld a troop of horsemen galloping towards them.

The blazing turban and graceful figure which headed the troopers bespoke the Sultan Corradin, who, leaping from his foaming steed, accosted the women with looks of indignation.

'Tis good I have overtaken you at least, and now will I repay these Christian dogs in their own coin. I ought to have known that they were alike devoid of generosity or honour.' He then ordered some of his slaves to load the women with fetters. 'Guard them closely,' continued he, 'but offer no violence to their persons and hasten after me to Jerusalem.'

As he spoke he vaulted into his saddle, and disappeared from the sight of the trembling women, who in vain sought to account for this sudden alteration in the conduct of the Sultan. The respect of their guards, the ready obedience of their slaves, was now converted into mockery and scorn. Their hands were laden with chains, and being lifted upon camels, they were not permitted to halt till they reached the holy city, while the savage soldiers prevented them from enjoying the melancholy comfort of pouring their sorrows into each other's bosoms.

The interpreter, who seemed endowed with a little more feeling than the others, informed them that they were now upon Mount Calvary, and the pious sufferers raised their streaming eyes to the spot where their Redeemer had closed His earthly pilgrimage, and implored Him to have compassion on their sufferings, while in imitation of His glorious

example, they endeavoured to mould themselves to a pious resignation.

At the gates of Jerusalem they were met by the body-guards of the Sultan, who conducted the captives to a strong tower, where they were handed over to the care of the jailor, who, regardless of their tears and supplications, removed them to different cells, after loading them with additional fetters.

In this noisome situation we must leave the wretched prisoners, to return to their knights whom we left wounded near Cesaria.

They were conducted, by the orders of the Sultan, to that city, and treated with such care and attention that in less than a month their numerous wounds were healed, when they were immediately transported to Jerusalem, where to their horror they learned that the fortress of Dock had been for some time invested by the infidels; and they had only to hope that their wives, warned by the pigeons which they had flown from the fatal field, had retreated to Acre before the arrival of the enemy.

Another subject weighed heavy on the mind of Frederick, and served to embitter his captivity. The Banner of the Lion had disappeared from his sight in the tumult of battle, nor could he learn whether Eschenbach, who carried it on that awful day, had fallen among the slain. Often did he converse with his brother on this subject, while he recalled the impressive words with which Farnsburg had committed it to his charge.

As they enjoyed full liberty to roam about Jerusalem, they often visited those spots for ever rendered sacred to every Christian by the miracles and sufferings of their Redeemer, and offered up their fervent prayers for the safety of those at a distance. Returning one day from this pious office, they sat down to a repast, which was always sent to them from the Sultan's kitchen. Having raised the cover of a golden dish they were astonished when they discovered only a small roll of parchment containing the following lines:—

'At the hour of evening prayer, repair to that spot where

our Saviour held the paschal feast; so shall I know whether my eyes have deceived me, and if you are really those I do anxiously long to see, and then also shall you know the writer of this—when she may have it in her power to make some return for—but I will say no more till my doubts are removed.'

The knights read this mysterious note over and over again. It was written with some red liquid, but not very intelligibly, in German characters. They resolved, however, to attend the summons, and at sunset repaired to the appointed spot. On approaching the place, a troop of the Sultan's body-guard commanded them to halt, as the favourite Sultana, who was a Christian, was then performing her devotions, during which no man was permitted to approach the temple. They were obliged to submit, and in a few minutes the Sultana issued from the house, when everyone present threw themselves prostrate on the earth.

Frederick and Henry alone despising the slavish adulation retired a little distance, till the mistress had passed, and then entered the house, but were disappointed in their expectations of meeting anyone, and returned to their abode with ungratified curiosity.

On the following day another roll appeared just as had the former, containing these words:—

'Had you not attended yesterday, I might have feared that my lines had never met your eye, or that you had been unable to decipher my characters; but you appeared and your conduct induces me to believe you are in reality the cold-blooded Germans I conceived you to be. The Sultana passed you in all the splendour of youthful beauty and regal magnificence, but your eye marked her not, nor did your stubborn knee own her presence. Fear cannot be the motive, for, if I am not mistaken in you, fear is a stranger to your bosoms. Come then again this evening to the chapel, wait in the court the approach of the Sultana, look boldly on her, and I will be answerable for the consequences.'

The knights in vain sought for some clue to decipher who the unknown writer could be. At the hour of vespers they

returned to the same place, and were again commanded by the guards to withdraw, but before they could leave the court-yard the Sultana appeared. They looked towards her, when throwing back her long veil, she displayed to their astonished eyes the beautiful features of Adelgunda, and entered the chapel.

The knights were most anxious to await her return, but an interpreter having commanded them either to conform to the Oriental custom by prostrating themselves on the approach of the Sultana or else to retire, they chose the latter and hastened to their home. Four days elapsed without anything occurring which could tend to explain the mystery.

On the morning of the fifth an Emir waited on them and announced in the name of the favourite that they were free, and might return to the Christian army.

'Our sublime Sultan,' continued the Emir, 'has granted to his favourite the freedom of such Christian slaves as she might choose. On you, as being her countrymen, has her election fallen. By her orders the Divan has granted you this passport, which will ensure your safety, and the Sultana's generous care has added this purse to supply your wants upon the road.'

The Emir, after receiving the grateful thanks of the astonished knights, withdrew, and Frederick, anxious to avail himself as soon as possible of this happy change, opened the purse for the purpose of taking out some gold to purchase horses for their conveyance, when he found the following note:—

'Noble Knight,—Your former generosity had engraven your remembrance too strongly on my heart not to recognise your features at first sight. May I trust that you also still recollect the unfortunate Adelgunda, who now restores you your liberty, not as cancelling her obligation, but as a proof that she was not altogether unworthy of them. She has yet one favour to request, that you may implicitly obey the following injunctions without seeking to know the cause, suffice it to say it is imperious.

'With some of the money which this purse contains purchase two horses and a camel, and on the day after to-morrow when the rising sun shall gild the dome of the mosque, leave the city by the gate leading to Sidon. Under the palm-trees which skirt the road you will find a poor Christian slave, who will conduct your camel. I have also obtained his liberty, and you will find his name in the passport. I would say he is dear to Adelgunda, but I know, to ensure your protection, it is enough to tell you he is unfortunate. If you are willing to grant my requests, repair this afternoon to the chapel and on the altar leave an olive branch.

'Farewell, and may you be happier than the unfortunate

'ADELGUNDA.'

Although the knights discovered something mysterious in these injunctions, and that their inclinations would have led them to Dock rather than Sidon, they thought their benefactress entitled to implicit obedience, and therefore at the appointed hour deposited the olive branch on the altar, while they made the requisite preparations for their departure. As they were about to leave their abode on the appointed day Frederick and Henry were astonished to find the inhabitants of the city running about with distraction in their looks, and hastening to the great square. On inquiry, they learned that the Sultan's palace was on fire, but as the hour specified for their departure was already arrived, they proceeded towards the gates of the city. Here they were stopped, but on producing their passport the guards kissed the seal of the Sultan and permitted them to depart.

They reached the palm-grove and found the Christian slave waiting their approach. He was clothed in rags, and in broken German informed them that he had suffered greatly from the barbarity of a cruel taskmaster, and should most probably have sunk under his trials but that the generous Sultana had procured his release, and desired him to wait beneath these trees the arrival of some Christian knights who would convey him back to his own country.

Frederick inquired if he knew why the favourite had ordered them to proceed towards Sidon instead of Dock or Acre, to which he answered that he believed the reason was on account of a powerful force which was assembling at that place both by sea and land for the relief of Acre, which as well as Dock was invested by the troops of Corradin.

CHAPTER XIX.

FREDERICK and Henry rejoiced in the thoughts of being once more marshalled to the glorious field and probably made instrumental in the delivery of their wives, and guided by the slave proceeded with the utmost activity.

They had already passed Nazareth when one day, the heat being excessive, their conductor persuaded them to rest for a few hours under the shade of some trees, which seemed to invite the wearied traveller.

On entering the grove, Frederick beheld with pleasing astonishment a neat small cottage built in the European fashion, over the door of which appeared a cross and the feudatory badge of the Black Knights.

Without hesitation he knocked at the wicket, which was opened by a venerable old man of a most prepossessing countenance. His form seemed nearly bent double by age, and he supported himself on a staff, while a profusion of white beard descending over his breast impressing the knights with a sensation of respect and awe which was in no wise diminished when the old man thus addressed them :—

'Welcome to my roof, noble Knights of the Lion! By my calculations you should have arrived while yesterday's sun was yet in the heavens, but a hermit's simple fare does not suffer much by such delays.' Beholding the evident surprise which the words had occasioned, he continued, 'Wonder not at my prescience; it is a gift which I possess among many others, but come, noble Frederick and Henry, you are both welcome to my humble roof.'

They followed in silence, but after some time Henry with hesitation said, 'Venerable sage, since your eye can reach

beyond the ken of mortals, oh, say how fare the partners of our hearts?'

'Had you asked this question but a few days ago,' replied the sage, 'I should have answered you with regret, for I then trembled for their lives, but now I can afford to give you the most pleasing intelligence.'

He then related all that had occurred till the departure of the females from Dock, and ended by assuring the knights that they at this moment waited their arrival at Sidon.

Frederick and Henry regarded their host as something more than mortal, and recommended themselves humbly to his prayers. At this moment the Christian slave entered, to inquire of the old man where he should find water for the camel and horses.

The hoary sage turned to reply, when, starting back, he knit his brow saying, 'Adelgunda, Countess of Zealano, what seek you here?' The slave shrank from his gaze, and endeavoured to conceal his face, while the knights in vain sought to find some trace of the beautiful Sicilian in the squalid features of the captive. 'Go,' continued the old man, 'cleanse yourself from that filth which so ill becomes your rank or sex, and return to answer for your present appearance.'

The slave now fell upon her knees and entreated not to be delivered into the hands of the Infidels. But the hermit refused to listen to a word till she should have thrown off her disguise. She was forced to obey, and in a few minutes returning, exhibited to the knights, who had hitherto been prevented from uttering a word by their astonishment, the blooming complexion and large black eyes of Adelgunda, which sparkling beneath the slave's cap, seemed to petition for pardon and not to doubt of its being granted.

"By heavens, 'tis she herself,' exclaimed Frederick and Henry at the same moment.

'Oh why,' cried Adelgunda, did you, holy father, not leave them in error? They will now perceive the danger of having assisted my escape, and may perhaps refuse to let me accompany them further.'

The two brothers assured the lovely countess that they

felt themselves alike bound by honour and inclination to protect her from every danger, though at the expense of their lives. 'But,' added Frederick, 'forgive my curiosity if I beg to know how the lovely Adelgunda, whom I left at Messina, should be found on the throne of Jerusalem, and how she came to quit the splendour of a palace for the garb of a slave.'

'I can have no secrets,' replied the beauteous Sicilian, 'to hide from my benefactor, but must request your patience, if my tale should be found tedious. Prepare, then, to listen to a narrative composed of little else than a succession of misfortunes.

'You may remember the day when your generosity rescued my father and Count Molesé from the resentment of Frederick. We had not yet lost sight of the shores of Messina when we beheld a galley bearing down upon us. It was in vain our rowers exerted their utmost strength. The strange vessel gained fast upon us, and we could already distinguish the crescent on her flag. They soon came up with us, and throwing their grapplings on board, made us all prisoners. My father and uncle were instantly chained to the oar, while an unfeeling barbarian urged their exertions by continued blows. My wretched father, unused to labour, must have sunk under his accumulated sufferings, had I not sometimes, favoured by the darkness, contrived to share with him the provisions which were allowed me. The galley having suffered in a storm we were forced to put into the harbour of Sidon. Corradin, the Sultan's son, was just arrived from Damascus, and observing our disabled situation, sent us assistance, and when our galley entered the harbour repaired on board, and learning from the Emir that in the course of his cruise he had captured some noble Sicilians, the generous youth offered to ransom the whole, at whatever price the Turk should value them. The price was fixed at a hundred golden sequins, which were immediately paid, and the Sultan commanded the prisoners to be produced.

'The Emir, who it would seem had been captivated with the little share of beauty which nature had bestowed upon me, had secretly determined to reserve me for himself, and accordingly when my father and the other prisoners were brought

upon deck, confined me to my cabin; but Zealano, falling upon his knees while he thanked the noble stranger (for he had not yet learned that it was the Sultan whom he addressed), implored him to have compassion on his only child and remove her chains, as without her liberty itself were of no value. Corradin, turning to the Turkish captain, chid him severely for his duplicitly, and commanded him immediately to produce his captive. I appeared with my veil lowered, and spoke my thanks with all the ardour of a feeling heart.

'The Sultan appeared affected by my words and the tone of my voice, and requested that I would graciously condescend to remove my veil and let him behold a countenance which he should be happy to recognise should we ever meet again. I obeyed—nor think me vain, my noble friends, if I say that Corradin seemed more than pleased. He gazed at me intently for some time, and then hastily requested me to cover my face again. He seemed to meditate within himself, and, having requested to know our names, commanded the Emir to carry us on shore, where we might continue till we should find some vessel to transport us to our own country.

'As he was about to quit the galley he turned to me, saying, "Farewell, lovely Adelgunda; to have beheld you is a pleasure that were but cheaply bought with half my dominions, and willingly would I resign the whole to be assured that we should never part." At these words he descended into his own galley and returned on shore.

'We soon after quitted the indignant Emir, and on landing found several slaves in attendance, who conducted us to a magnificent palace, where we first learned that our deliverer was the Sultan himself.

'I trembled with a kind of foreboding horror when I recollected the words and manner of Corradin, and entreated my father to hasten to the port, and secure without delay some vessel for our conveyance. But as the day was already far spent he determined to wait till the following morning. The delay of these few hours decided my fate, and made me wretched, for as my father was preparing to go down to the harbour he was summoned to the palace of the Sultan.

'I cannot describe the dread and anxiety which I experienced during his absence, but they were increased when I beheld Count Zealano, for I cannot give him the name of father, return with a countenance of exultation and attended by numerous slaves carrying bags of gold, which they laid upon a table. Spare my feelings, and allow me to pass over in silence the conversation which followed between us; suffice it to say, this cursed gold was the price of my person and liberty, although I was to be permitted the free exercise of my religion. My prayers and anger, my despair and expressions of wounded pride, were heard with equal indifference, and my savage parent, without expressing the slightest feeling, commanded the slaves to carry me off by force, in case I should attempt to resist.

'This unnatural order was more than my frame could support, and I sank insensible into the arms of the barbarians who approached to execute my father's commands. I must have continued in that state for some time, for on recovering my recollection I found myself reclining upon a magnificent ottoman, round which stood several female slaves. The moment I opened my eyes the whole horrors of my situation flashed upon my mind. I beckoned to the slaves to withdraw, and began searching for some instrument to put a close to my miserable existence.

'At that moment a curtain at the end of the apartment was slowly drawn, and the Sultan knelt before me, imploring me by the tenderest names to listen to his passion. I maintained an obstinate silence; indeed, my sorrow at that moment was such that I was incapable of uttering a word. Till then my father had been the object of my warmest affection, and I had fondly flattered myself that the tenderness was reciprocal; but to find myself at once deceived, forsaken, sold by that parent for whose happiness I would willingly have sacrificed my life, was more than I could bear, and had not nature come to my relief with a flood of tears, my heart must have burst.

'Corradin, deeply affected by my sufferings, used every means to soothe me, but in reply I accused him of perfidy, and insisted upon his immediately leaving me. He, however,

still continued to deprecate my wrath, and assured me that, violent as his passion was, he should never have ventured to urge his suit had not my father voluntarily offered to sell me as his wife—but, continued he, "deign to listen to me, lovely Adelgunda; I feel I cannot live without you; my heart, my reason both tell me that if deprived of you grief would ere long annihilate my faculties; but all I venture to ask is this—do not quit me—leave it to time and the continued proofs of my adoration to plead my cause, or else to furnish me with sufficient fortitude to bear your loss. Not a word to urge my hope shall pass my lips, and I would even say not a look or slightest aspiration of a sigh, were I capable of restraining such. You shall be free as a queen who beholds her every wish anticipated, although she cannot quit the realms o'er which she rules. My treasures shall be at your command, that you may follow without restraint the dictates of your liberal and generous disposition. I know the restraints enjoined on your sex by the customs of the East carry an air of slavery to the eyes of a European, but you shall not be immured within a harem, and shall be permitted to roam wherever you please and allowed to worship the God of your fathers according to your own forms. If you can be satisfied with these proposals, say but a word and I will quit you instantly, nor ever dare to present myself before you till I have obtained your own permission."

'Although I could only look upon him as the primary cause of all my misfortunes, still I could not but feel that he used his unjust power with moderation and even generosity. I therefore bound myself not to make any attempts upon my life, or seek to escape, provided he should rigidly adhere to his own propositions. He solemnly swore to do so, and retired, rejoicing at the thoughts of having calmed my transports, and not doubting that time would ultimately conquer my scruples.

'He observed his promises in so far that he never ventured to intrude upon me without permission; but as I was constantly teased with supplicatory messages, scarce a day elapsed without my seeing him, and although he never actually spoke

his love, his large dark eyes, frequently filled with tears, were constantly bent upon me with such an expression of hopeless passion, that I often found it difficult to arm mine with severity sufficient to check his hopes.

'We soon after this removed to Jerusalem, where my heart once more felt the sensation of pleasure in the opportunities I had of softening the captivity or loosening the chains of the many Christian slaves whom the chances of war had placed in the power of the infidels.

'Corradin, apparently tired of his continued state of restraint, or urged by the violence of his passion, little accustomed to solicit in vain, threw off the mildness which had hitherto regulated his deportment towards me. He now seldom quitted my apartment, and urged his suit with all the ardour natural to his disposition. Had he continued to suffer in silence, I might at length have been conquered by pity, but when he stated his claims as expecting a favourable return, I beheld in him only the purchaser of my innocence and honour, and determined to perish sooner than grant him the slightest favour.

'Fortunately for me, about this period the success of your arms awoke Corradin from his dream of security. He determined to oppose you in person, and wished to have carried me with him to the camp, but I resisted, and he was at length forced unwillingly to comply.

'The day of the Sultan's departure was for me a day of rejoicing, and from that moment my whole thoughts were engrossed in contriving means to effect my escape which I trusted might be accomplished through the means o some of the Christian slaves. At my own request Corradin had built a pavilion on the garden wall, from whence through a grated window I could overlook the whole city. There I used to sit for hours together, endeavouring to loosen the iron bars. It was an office of indescribable labour, but what will not perseverance, actuated by the hopes of liberty, effect?

'I succeeded in making an opening through which I could pass my body, and on my knees offered up my grateful thanks to heaven and implored its assistance in the prosecution of

my plans. The hours which should have been devoted to sleep I employed in constructing a ladder with silken cords, and also prepared this slave's dress which I thought best calculated for disguising my person, the whole of which I concealed in my private chapel where no inhabitant of the harem was allowed to enter. I used frequently to get myself carried through the streets and towards the gates in a kind of litter, under pretence of finding it necessary for my health, but in reality to learn the different avenues leading from the city. In one of these excursions I saw and recognised you through the curtains of my litter, but, as my bearers passed at a quick pace, I feared that it might be a delusion of the fancy, and that I had been deceived by my hopes. Trembling with an anxiety which I could scarcely conceal, the moment I reached the palace, I sent for a list of all the Christian slaves, and it was not till I had received it that I recollected I had omitted to ask your name when I met you in Sicily.

'At length, on perusing the list, I found that two knights had been sent by the Sultan himself, with orders that they should be treated with the highest respect, and served from my own table. My heart whispered me that one of these must be my generous deliverer, and you know what followed. On the morning which I had specified in my note for your departure, before the dawn of day, I placed a number of combustibles under my bed. I set fire to them in hopes that I might be thought to have perished in the flames, and, hastening to the pavilion, lowered myself into the street concealed in the slave's disguise. I waited with the utmost anxiety till the gates of the city should be opened, and in the meantime the alarm occasioned by the flames, which by this time had burst from the wing of the palace, favoured my escape, and I reached the palm grove where you found me.'

CHAPTER XX.

WHEN Adelgunda had finished her narrative, Frederick and Henry once more renewed their grateful thanks and promises of protection, and proposed to continue their journey as soon as they had partaken of the refreshments provided by their venerable host. In the course of their repast the old man informed his guests that he was a member of the order of Black Knights, and had for many years followed the trade of arms in the tented field, but, having been taken prisoner by the infidels, had at length received his liberty from Sultan Saladin on condition of never again carrying arms, since which time he had devoted his life to the service of the Lord. He, however, still pretended to be endowed with supernatural powers, which he had acquired from a learned Dervish, and, on the faith of his gift of prescience, comforted the knights by the assurance of Adelgunda's flight having remained undiscovered, as she was supposed to have perished in the flames.

As in those days the power of necromancy and the occult sciences formed a part of the creed of even the most enlightened, his discourse had the desired effect upon his hearers, who in consequence felt the chief part of their fears removed.

When the grey tints of evening began to shroud the landscape, our knights pursued their journey with Adelgunda, who had again resumed her disguise. For five days they continued to travel with the utmost expedition. On the morning of the sixth they perceived the gilded minarets of Sidon in the distance, when Adelgunda, seeing a termination to her troubles, and feeling that deceit was no longer necessary, acknowledged that the old man of the forest, who had excited so much surprise in them, was, in fact, only a priest whom she had employed as her private chaplain at Jerusalem, as on account of

his extreme age he would be less liable to arouse the jealousy of Corradin. Through his means her flight had been planned and executed. She also confessed that their meeting at the solitary house had been previously arranged, and that he should pretend to the gift of prophecy so as to bring about the discovery of her sex and condition in such a manner as to raise their warmest compassion, and secure their protection should they have felt inclined to resent the deception she put upon them.

'But do not be alarmed,' continued she; 'for all that he related as to your wives is correct and true, for he learned it from the Sultan's last messenger before leaving Jerusalem.' Then, bursting into tears, she cried: 'Pardon, noble Frederick, all my deception, and have compassion on a wretched, fatherless outcast, who beholds herself in a land of strangers, without a human being to whom she can look for support.'

Frederick clasped the lovely mourner to his breast, and swore that he and Clara should ever regard her as a beloved child, and watch over her with all the affection of the fondest parents.

On reaching the gates of Sidon, which were gladly opened to receive them, the knights learned with transport that King Emeric was within the city; and, having lodged their fair charge at a caravansary, hastened to learn every possible tidings of their wives; whom—although they could no longer rely on the assurances of the sage of the forest—they still hoped to find under the protection of Emeric, as they understood for certain that they had escaped from Dock. In this hope they were cruelly disappointed, but learned from Eschenbach with considerable pleasure that the banner of the Lion had been saved at Cesaria, and at this moment floated over the walls of Sidon. They afterwards waited on the King, who received them with every demonstration of regard, and confessed that to their valour he had been solely indebted for his life and liberty. Learning their anxiety, he promised to hasten the expedition destined for the relief of Acre, and actually to set sail with the first favourable wind.

Satisfied with these assurances, the knights returned to the caravansary, to communicate their hopes to Adelgunda,

and found her in conversation with the old priest, who was that moment arrived. After apologising to Frederick for his well-meant deceit, he informed them that the favourite's flight had, contrary to their expectations, been discovered, and also the nature of it, as almost immediately after their departure from the lonely house, several horsemen had arrived, and inquired after the Christian knights, and in particular for a person who accompanied them in the habit of a slave. He related how he had luckily persuaded them that the fugitives had taken the road to Tyre; and the moment they departed had proceeded towards this place with all possible expedition. Frederick saw in this account a fresh cause of gratitude towards the Almighty for having so wonderfully protected them and enabled them to escape from the pursuit of their enemies.

During these communications Adelgunda had quitted the apartment unperceived, and, having thrown aside the slave's disguise, now entered clad in magnificent attire, which, together with her jewels to an immense value, she had committed to the care of the priest before quitting the Palace of Corradin. Joy flushed her cheek and added a brighter lustre to her eye, and even Frederick could not contemplate her present appearance unmoved.

Turning to the knights, he introduced her as his adopted daughter, and asked Eschenbach in a whisper whether such transcendent charms could not make him forego his determination of never loving again. Eschenbach smilingly replied: 'The temptation is such that I cannot answer for myself, and should I yield to its influence, you alone are responsible.'

He soon after entered into conversation with Adelgunda, and found that the beauties of her mind at least equalled the attractions of her person. Meanwhile active preparations had been making for the departure of the fleet, and the day for sailing actually fixed, when ambassadors arrived from the Sultan to King Emeric with secret overtures of peace; and it soon became publicly known that a truce for six years had been concluded between the sovereigns, the conditions of which were highly favourable to the Christians.

Twelve towns which had been already captured by the Sultan were given up. A free trade was granted both by sea and land, and a permission to establish priests at Jerusalem, to whose keeping should be assigned the holy sepulchre of our Saviour, while all pilgrims should be allowed to visit it unmolested. In the meantime all prisoners were to be given up, and the Sultan to defray the expenses of their journey to some seaport.

Great was the joy of the Christians when these terms were made public. The town resounded with feasts and revelry.

The courtiers distinguished themselves particularly by their magnificent entertainments on this occasion, one of which was given in an extensive garden beyond the walls of the city. Adelgunda and the knights were among the guests. The tables were laid under the shade of palm-trees, and, as the night approached, myriads of coloured lamps affixed to them exhibited a blaze not inferior to that of the sun in his meridian splendour. Every heart seemed dilated with joy, and many a cup was emptied to the return of peace.

Frederick and Henry alone could not participate in the general joy. They thought of Clara and of Agnes, and Frederick, who had left his wife pregnant, felt all the anxiety of the father, added to the tenderness of the husband.

One of the courtiers, pretending to observe their chagrin, proposed to them to roam about the wood, and behold the gay scene from a distance. As they did not seem inclined to mingle in it, Adelgunda, who appeared tired of the banquet, was also invited to rise, and gladly accepted the offer. They continued to wander through the grove for some time, and by degrees retired to a greater distance, when they were startled by the sound of clashing of swords behind them, and before the knights had time to grasp their brands and put themselves in a posture of defence, they were dragged to the ground and bound with cords. Adelgunda shared the same fate, while their insidious conductor retired unperceived. It was in vain that they struggled or attempted to call to their companions for assistance. They were placed upon horseback, and hurried into the interior of the country.

When the dawn began to appear they had reached a valley where a large troop of Saracens were encamped. To the care of these they were committed, and the horsemen who had accompanied them so far returned, still retaining an obstinate silence. The commander of the Saracen troop treated them with great courtesy, unbound the cords, and dressed the wounds which had been occasioned by their tight ligatures. These attentions yielded but little comfort to the knights, who would have deemed death preferable to their present situation, as they conceived that their lives were only preserved at this time in order to be exposed to future tortures. But above all the sufferings of Adelgunda were exquisite almost beyond endurance, not that she feared for herself, as her soul spurned the dread of death, but because she thought herself the cause of the misfortunes in which her benefactors were involved, and she wept in all the bitterness of grief.

Frederick endeavoured to comfort her, and to convince her of the necessity of submitting to the dispensations of Providence. Their further conversation was prevented by the leader of the guards, who imposed silence, and, dividing his troops into three squadrons, committed to each the charge of one of the prisoners.

On the following day they reached the fortress of Dan, the gates of which were occupied by the Sultan's own guards. On entering the square they were lifted from their horses, and heavy chains not only fastened but actually rivetted to their legs and arms—a cruel precaution which seemed to [illegible] that they were to be worn till death.

The prisoners took leave of each other, by look[illegible]ly, but so fraught with sorrow that it was impossible to [illegible]old them without feeling pity. They were, however, c[illegible]veyed into separate dungeons; the heavy doors creaking [illegible] their hinges were closed upon them, and the wretched sufferers left to reflect on all the horrors of their situation.

It is now time to return to Jerusalem, and relate how the snare had been laid for them.

Adelgunda's artifice had not met with all the success with

which she had flattered herself. When the consternation occasioned by the first appearance of the fire had subsided, her attendants being found all safe, and the clothes she had worn on the preceding evening discovered in the chapel, but above all the bars of the pavilion removed and the ladder of cords attached to it, excited the suspicions of the chief eunuch. He examined all her attendants with the most rigid scrutiny, and a Christian slave, whose office it was to prepare the favourite's meals, was at length brought to confess that her mistress had for some time past held a secret correspondence with two German knights who were served from her own table, as she had several times received orders to send along with their repast a covered dish in which Adelgunda had deposited a written scroll, for which secret service she had been munificently rewarded.

The eunuch immediately ordered the knights to be sent for, but found that having received their liberty they had left the city at daybreak, and learning from the Divan that a slave had also been mentioned in their passport, although he knew that they had no attendant with them, and discovered from the sentinels at the gates that they had actually left the city without any companion, the whole truth flashed upon his mind. He instantly dispatched troops in pursuit of the fugitives in every direction, and at the same time sent a courier to the Sultan with an account of all that had occurred.

The transports which Corradin experienced on receipt of this intelligence amounted almost to frenzy. He who adored Adelgunda with such fervour of affection, whose hopes had of late been flattered by kind letters, to find himself thus suddenly deceived by his mistress, betrayed by those captives towards whom he had behaved with such open generosity! Who can wonder at the storm of passion which now raged within his breast, and seemed to swallow up every other feeling? Forgetting his army, and despising his conquests, he flew towards Jerusalem, determined to take signal vengeance on the perpetrators of this treason, whom he doubted not must have been arrested by some of the parties sent on their pursuit so immediately after their escape.

It was in the course of this expedition that he overtook the unfortunate Clara and Agnes, as already mentioned.

Disappointed in his expectations of capturing the objects of his indignation, and learning that they had actually taken refuge within the walls of Sidon, he hesitated not to offer advantageous terms of peace to the Christians in bargaining for his private revenge. One of the secret conditions of the treaty having this for its object was successfully put in practice by an ungrateful king and his mercenary courtiers.

Unspeakable was the sorrow of the remaining knights of the Lion, when, on the day following the banquet, they missed their gallant leaders and the lovely Adelgunda. They inquired for them in every quarter, but all the courtiers pretended the most perfect ignorance, while at the same time a report was insidiously circulated that Frederick, tired of his wife, had yielded to the fascinations of the favourite and carried her off in a galley for Cyprus.

When this report reached the ears of Eschenbach, he immediately called together all his companions, and also his allies, the Black Knights, and in a body proceeded to the palace of King Emeric, desiring that he would either grant him the right of summoning to the lists the base calumniators of their leader's honour, or, if none should dare to appear and support their charge at the hazard of their lives, that the monarch should publicly refute the base assertion. Emeric seemed to yield to their wishes and even to participate in their feelings, and summoned together the whole courtiers, but no one ventured to take up the gage which Eschenbach threw into the middle of the circle, and acknowledged the consciousness of the falsehood of the report, promising to contradict it on every occasion.

Much as the knights reflected on the mysterious disappearance of their friends, their hearts were too honest and unsuspicious for a moment to guess at the real cause, and they even felt indignant with the old priest (Adelgunda's chaplain) for hinting at the possibility of so base an act of treachery.

Finding, however, that all their researches proved fruitless,

and fearing that the women at Acre, despairing of their husbands' lives, might return to Europe, Eschenbach and his companions determined to sail for that place and offer their services to the wives of their unfortunate friends.

In pursuance of this determination they took an affectionate leave of the old priest, who, still persisting in his suspicions of treachery, resolved to remain and endeavour to make some useful discovery when the caution of the courtiers should be blunted by their departure.

The voyage proved propitious, and, on arriving at Acre, Eschenbach was rejoiced to find his father in the house of the Templars. After the first joyful salutations he inquired for the women, and learned with infinite sorrow that Clara and Agnes had departed for Jerusalem some time before, under the protection of the Sultan.

Thus saved the cruel task of communicating the mysterious disappearance of their husbands, he trembled for their own safety, if the priest's conjectures should prove true. He therefore resolved to conceal the circumstances from Adelaide and Bertha, as the latter's grief, though mellowed into a resigned melancholy, made her so weak that she was still unable to bear any shock.

On the following day Lewis summoned together the sad remains of their noble order, and to his horror found that out of four times eighty who had left the fortress of the Lion twenty-five only remained.

It was determined to have a funeral service performed for the souls of the deceased heroes in the Church of the Templars, at which the survivors assisted with sentiments of the purest devotion.

On returning from this sacred office they found the commander of the Black Knights waiting for them at their caravansary. He came to thank them in the name of his whole order for the powerful support he had received from their valour, and request a continuance of their friendship, while he at the same time informed them that, in consequence of the truce, their services being no longer required, a vessel was prepared to convey them to their beloved country, where he

and his knights were about to return. Lewis requested that he might delay his departure until they should learn some tidings of the two young Counts Frohburg; but the commander urged the impossibility of delay, as in a week at furthest the westerly winds would set in, when no vessel durst sail for Europe without the most imminent hazard of being wrecked on the coasts of Arabia. They must therefore either depart immediately or wait for five months, when these trade winds would cease—a delay which the calls of his order in Germany would not brook.

Eschenbach endeavoured to persuade Lewis to avail himself of the present opportunity and return to Europe with Bertha and Adelaide. He represented to him in glowing colours the grief which would necessarily fill the hearts of his father and old Frohburg should they behold none of their children return from Palestine with their allies, while rumours calculated to distract them with fears, and probably bring their grey hairs with sorrow to the grave, would inevitably reach their ears; that, on the contrary, the arrival of Lewis and the women would tend to comfort them and revive their hopes. 'I,' continued Eschenbach, 'who have no parent to mourn my absence, no babe to lisp my return, will continue here to watch over the fate of our beloved leader, and doubt not ere long we shall all offer up a common thanksgiving in the chapel of the Lion.'

Lewis could not resist the arguments of his friend, which were alike founded on reason and filial duty, and accordingly departed on the following morning with Adelaide and the sorrowing Bertha towards Alexandria, from whence they were to sail for Europe.

CHAPTER XXI.

ESCHENBACH beheld his friends embark with mingled emotions, yet not with sorrow, for, having lost Maria, Europe no longer held forth any charms to him, and time had not yet sufficiently cicatrised the wounds of his heart to permit him to revisit unmoved scenes replete with so many tender recollections.

On reaching Sidon Emeric and his court had already removed to Cyprus, and the town was only filled with caravans and merchants who were too much engrossed by their own concerns to listen to his inquiries, had they even been able to give any information as to the objects of his search. Wearied with his fruitless efforts Eschenbach was on the point of sailing for Cyprus with his few remaining companions when one morning the old priest of the forest entered his apartment, but so disguised that some time elapsed before any of the knights were able to recognise him.

'Wonder not at my appearance,' said the old man, 'I have not been idle since last we met, and bring you at length certain intelligence of our friends which I trust the Father of all mercies will enable us to profit by. My suspicions, which the generosity of your own heart induced you to reject, were alas! but too true.

'After the departure of Emeric, having hitherto failed in every attempt, I despaired of gaining any intelligence at Sidon, and under the pretence of performing a pilgrimage resolved to proceed towards the holy city.

'In the execution of this plan the immediate hand of Providence guided me towards the fortress of Dan. Its lofty towers were already seen rising above the palm-trees, when, approaching a fountain by the wayside to quench my thirst,

I saw a troop of horsemen advancing, and fearing that they might be some of the wandering Arabs of the desert, I climbed up a spreading palm-tree which shaded the fountain. They alighted from their horses, which they watered at the well, and two of them, whose dress bespoke them to be the leaders of the party, seated themselves under the tree in which I was perched. Fear and curiosity made me listen to their conversation, of which I lost not a word; but you may conceive my astonishment when I heard the names of our friends mentioned and found that they and their unfortunate wives are at this moment languishing in the prisons of Dan, while horrid preparations are making to end their lives by the most cruel tortures.

'This intelligence made me tremble, and as soon as the horsemen retired, I descended from my friendly palm, determined not to quit that neighbourhood till I had fully examined the strength and situation of the fortress. In pursuance of this determination, feigning sickness, I took up my abode in the hut of a kind-hearted Greek who treated me with the utmost attention during my feigned illness. Under pretence of warming myself in the sun I used to walk out, while my whole design was to examine the impregnable walls of the fortress. Situated on a lofty rock on one side of which a tamarind wood extends to the very base, I was enabled to approach and survey it unperceived. The rock on which the fortifications are built rises precipitously from the plain on every side except towards the west, where the ascent would have been easy had not an immense tower, rising above the rest of the works, been joined to the rock so as to render that side even more difficult of access than the others. From this tower I could perceive small grated windows at which my foreboding heart told me our friends were then sighing; but, to satisfy my doubts, on my return to the cottage of the Greek, I insensibly led the conversation to the fortress, and he, who had acted as a servant in it for many years, described with the utmost accuracy every apartment, without omitting the portentous tower, in which he told me there were thirty dungeons built one over the other from the lowest foundations

to the battlements. In Sultan Saladin's time, he said, these dungeons had constantly been filled with prisoners, many of whom breathed their last sigh within their walls; but that on Saladin's death the present Sultan had thrown open the gates, and granted liberty to all the captives.

'"Of late, however," continued the Greek, "Corradin seems inclined to walk in the footsteps of his predecessor, and he has cruelly immured several prisoners within that tower from whence they will most probably never be liberated but by death." He could not, however, inform me who those prisoners were, having never entered the fortress since the time of his acting as a servant.

'This intelligence, far from satisfying, had only aroused my curiosity. I accordingly on the following day bent my steps as usual towards the gates, where I beheld the Sultan himself approaching at the head of his body-guards. I prostrated myself after the Eastern fashion, and continued in that posture till the party had passed, when I ventured to look up and saw that he had taken the road leading to Syria, while a number of camels carrying his baggage followed in the rear.

'My heart presaged that the bloody work of death was already over, and overcome with the dreadful thought I sank down by the wayside regardless of my own fate.

'While I lay in this situation, exposed to the rays of a fou[illegible]ical sun, a slave who was conducting a camel to the the [illegible]ntain drew near and with compassionate looks inquired pilgri[illegible]cause of my distress. I answered that I was a Christian travelli[illegible]n who, trusting to the safety promised by Corradin, was stripp[illegible]ng towards Samaria when a party of soldiers, after barbard[illegible] me of all my little store, had treated me in the most Sultan wa[illegible] manner, but that having learned that the generous and had jus[illegible]at Dan I had dragged my feeble limbs thus far, with such ra[illegible] then had the mortification of seeing him pass compassionate s[illegible]idity as not to be able to address him.' The and flew towards[illegible]lave requested me to remain for a few minutes, with some refresh[illegible] the fortress, from whence he soon returned the utmost gratitud[illegible]ments, which I pretended to receive with [illegible]e. while he informed me that I ought

perhaps to rejoice at not having been enabled to speak to the Sultan at that moment, as he was no longer so well inclined towards the Christians as heretofore. When I inquired the cause he related to me what I knew so well already, but revived my almost drooping courage by adding that the Sultan had been obliged to postpone his revenge in consequence of a courier who had arrived the preceding evening requiring his immediate presence to assist his father in quelling a rebellion which had broken out in Phrygia and Cappadocia, and which would most probably detain him for several months. The moment the slave retired, I dropped upon my knees and offered up a humble thanksgiving to the Almighty power which had arrested the arm of the tyrant, and with renewed courage approached the tower, creeping among the tangled brakes by which it is surrounded. I had hoped to have been able to reach some of the grated windows, but the lowest of them is nearly forty yards from the ground. I however found that the wall was in several places greatly dilapidated and even so far decayed as to leave cavities and niches in which a person could easily conceal himself.

'Into one of these I contrived to scramble, and, laying my ear to the slight rents in the wall, could distinguish the creaking of doors and withdrawing of bolts, and almost fancied I could hear the sighs of the wretched inhabitants. I paused till all was silent and then ventured to call in a low voice, but as no sound was returned, and after remaining till it was dark, I regained the habitation of the friendly Greek unperceived.

'On the following morning after rewarding him for his generous assistance I hastened to this place to communicate my discovery and claim your assistance.'

Eschenbach and his four companions would have departed that moment to the relief of their friends, but feeling that prudence as well as courage was required in the execution of the enterprise, submitted themselves to the counsel and advice of the venerable priest. The night was spent in devising plans, none of which seemed to promise complete success. They

however resolved at all events to assume the disguise of pilgrims, and having provided themselves with such tools and instruments as the nature of their undertaking required, wait at the small village of Rechob, while the old priest should return to the fortress and obtain every possible information.

Having furnished themselves with proper passports and concealed their tools under the pilgrims' weeds, they departed, and reached Rechob unmolested, from whence the old man proceeded for Dan without having entered the village, which might otherwise have excited suspicions.

Three days did our pretended pilgrims pass in a state of the most dreadful anxiety. At length the venerable priest returned and satisfied their eager inquiries with the following accounts:

'Using the same pretence by which I had formerly raised the compassion of the slave (said the old man) I was admitted within the walls of the fortress, but should not have obtained a night's lodging, had I not feigned a sudden and violent illness, in consequence of which I was carried to one of the stables, and laid upon some straw, from whence I pretended to be incapable of moving. I continued this deception till I heard the guards retire to their evening's repast, when creeping from my concealment I approached the tower.

'A clear moonlight enabled me to distinguish every object, while at the same time a projecting buttress threw over me a complete shade. I remarked a flight of steps which seemed to wind in a spiral direction to the top of the building. I laid my ear upon the ground, but not a murmur was to be heard or the sound of a single footstep, and I therefore ventured to advance, although I had to cross a part of the courtyard on which the moonbeams shone, but on reaching the bottom of the [illegible] found that all access was prevented by an immense iron grati[illegible] Despairing of being able to make any further discoveries that night, I stole back to the stable, where I was found by the grooms in the morning, who good-naturedly rejoiced at seeing me apparently so much recovered. One of them in particular, who had formerly been a slave among the Christians, by whom he had been treated with great humanity,

showed me the utmost kindness. It was in vain, however, that I attempted to draw from him the information I was so anxious to obtain. I could only learn that there had been two hundred men left for the protection of the fortress, but he would never confess that there were any prisoners confined within the walls, although I several times endeavoured to bring him to that point. Hoping yet to gain some further intelligence, or make some additional observation, I affected to be so much weakened by the violence of my disorder as to be incapable of moving. I accordingly spent the whole of that day in the stable, and in the evening again ventured forth, but without discovering anything to increase our hopes.

'On the following morning, after partaking of the food which the kind slave brought me, I told him that feeling something better I wished to breathe the air and enjoy the warmth of the sun, and requested him to assist me. He kindly consented, and as the rays at that time shone directly upon the tower, conducted me to that part of the court. Without appearing to be at all interested in the subject, I drew him into conversation, and at length brought him to confess that the tower actually contained several state prisoners regarding whom the Sultan was so anxious that he had affixed his own seal to the door of each of their dungeons previous to his late departure, and that their provisions were now conveyed to them through an aperture in the wall in which was contrived a revolving iron screen on the shelves of which the food was placed by the gaoler, and then by touching a spring wheeled into the dungeon.

'I pretended to remark that his duty must be very severe, as of course prisoners of such consequence would be strictly guarded both day and night, and you may easily conceive my joy when in reply he informed me that the tower itself was of such strength that they never found it necessary to place any sentinels round it.

'These details were by no means given as I now relate them, but extracted from the slave at different times, and in a great measure by pretending to be so short-sighted as hardly to distinguish one object from another.

'Finding that I could gain no further intelligence, and anxious to communicate to you what I had been able to obtain, I pretended to feel revived by the genial influence of the sun and took leave of my conductor, who did not attempt to detain me, as he confessed should the Emir learn that I had been received within the fortress, and even permitted to remain two nights there, both he and his companions would be most severely punished. As long as I continued within sight of Dan, I was obliged to affect extreme lassitude and weakness, but having once gained the covert of the palm-grove, I hastened with all the ardour of youth to communicate to you my plans.

'Now listen to my design, which though both difficult and dangerous is, I trust, not impracticable, and if the other sons of the Lion are like their gallant leader I know that neither the one nor the other will make them shrink from the attempt.

'I have already explained to you my reasons for believing that our friends are confined in the lower dungeons of the tower and also the possibility of reaching the decayed part of the wall; if there we can contrive to perforate a hole of dimensions sufficient to get into the lower vault; should we even be deceived in our expectation of finding it occupied, we can at least close up the breach by which we have entered, and remain without fear of discovery.

'The height of the vaults (from the number which the tower is said to contain) must be very small. Should this actually be the case, by continuing our work upward from one dungeon to another (assisted by those whom we shall deliver) we may form a reasonable hope that, gigantic as the enterprise may appear, we shall ultimately succeed, for until the Sultan's return no one dares to touch his seals.'

Eschenbach and his companions clung with rapture to the hopes held out by the venerable priest, and vowed that no degree of labour or fatigue should make them shrink from an enterprise on which rested the liberty and probably the lives of their beloved friends.

Having provided themselves with dried provisions and some skins filled with water, under pretence of continuing their

pilgrimage, and carefully concealed their tools, they reached the copse-wood at the foot of the tower about the middle watch of the night. As it was impossible for the whole to stand in the breach at once, the priest remained below while the four knights began their labour with the utmost exertion. The wall, however, was much thicker and stronger than they had at first flattered themselves, and after two hours' incessant labour they had advanced but a little way in their work, when the priest called to them to cease and remain silent, as a troop of horse was just then approaching from the right side of the fortress.

The knights descended with the utmost caution and crept among the thick underwood.

The troopers whom the priest had observed were a patrol of Saracens who made their rounds twice every night to see that all was safe, and would have passed without giving the Christians any disturbance, had not two large bloodhounds who accompanied them scented the strangers and rushed into the brushwood with furious yells. The guards, who had already passed the spot, reined in their horses and paused to listen, but the yells not being repeated they fancied the dogs had sprung some game and continued their rounds. The hounds had in fact pursued the scent and already seized the old priest; when Eschenbach and another of the knights, grasping them by the throats to prevent their yells, stabbed them with their short daggers.

When all danger was over and they heard the gates of the fortress close behind the guards, the knights resumed their labour with redoubled diligence, and before the dawn of day had the happiness of hearing the last stone roll into the dungeon, while a voice cried in Italian: 'Are you men or spirits?' 'Be silent whoever thou art,' replied the old priest in the same language, 'thy deliverers are at hand.'

Having widened the breach so as to admit a person, the priest was lowered into the vault, where the knights immediately followed. The darkness preventing their being able to distinguish any object, the priest demanded of the prisoner who he was, and why he was confined. The prisoner's voice replied from out the darkness: 'I am a merchant of Tyre

whose extensive commerce had for some time flourished under the protection of the Sultan, but a few days ago his guards rushed into my house and without mercy dragged me hither, nor do I yet know of what I am accused.'

'Did you ever sell any merchandise to the Sultan's favourite at Jerusalem, or had you ever any communication with her?' asked the priest.

'Yes,' said he, 'I know her but too well; and heard, with the deepest regret, that the ungrateful viper had fled from her benefactor. But had she sought for refuge with her parent, I would have delivered her back into the hands of the injured Sultan.'

'What do I hear?' said the priest. 'Parent! Did my ears deceive me? Sure you cannot be that——?'

'Yes, stranger, I am the unfortunate Zealano.'

The knights shuddered to find that this villain was perhaps the only prisoner whose safety was certain, and were almost tempted to reserve him for the Sultan's vengeance, but the priest declared that by so doing they would counteract the designs of Providence, and that it was even more advisable to allow him to escape immediately, without confiding to him their names, or the extent of their design.

This advice was followed, and, having given him one of the pilgrims' dresses which they had brought with them, he was lowered down, and shown the road which he must pursue to reach Rechob.

Having got rid of this unwelcome companion ere the shades of night had entirely disappeared, Eschenbach and two of his companions were obliged to descend for the purpose of obtaining such pieces of wood as might be necessary for forming some kind of ladder. These they soon found, and having conveyed them safely through the aperture, they ventured to lay themselves down to enjoy some respite from their labours. Their rest, however, was of short duration, for the first dawn of day had scarcely glimmered through the opening in the wall, when the noise of the gaoler introducing Zealano's provisions roused them from their slumber to fresh exertions.

Finding the dungeon much lower than they had imagined, they proceeded to form a kind of scaffolding with the pieces of wood which they had provided, and to their inexpressible delight saw it finished before midday. On examining the roof, they found it so decayed by the damp that they hoped to be able to effect a communication with the upper dungeon before night, while the clanking of chains, which they could plainly distinguish overhead, urged them to more than human exertion. But the old priest, fearing that the noise of their mallets might be overheard by some of the inhabitants of the fortress, requested them to discontinue their labours till the soldiers should have retired to rest, and in the meantime to recruit their strength by a few hours' sleep, while he would watch over them.

Towards noon, the guards of the fortress, finding that the bloodhounds had not yet returned, resolved to go in search of them.

They naturally began by examining the brushwood where the dogs had first disappeared, in the supposition that they had fallen a prey to some wild beast.

The carcases were found in the spot where they had fallen, and a moment's examination showed that they had perished by the edge of the sword. The discovery made the guards shudder, but their fears were still further increased when they observed the breach in the wall close to where the dogs lay, as the Sultan, ere he departed, had sworn that the lives of everyone in the fortress should answer for the safety of the prisoners.

Without losing a moment, they flew to the Emir, to inform him of the fatal discovery they had made. Fearing to enter by the breach of the wall, the guards were obliged to make the whole circuit of the building, and had not the old priest, overcome by watching, yielded to the influence of sleep, the knights would have had ample time to provide for their own safety by flight; but, sunk in profound repose, they heard not the approaching steps of the guards, who, headed by the Emir, burst into the vault, exclaiming: 'Allah be praised, they are still here!' His voice roused the knights, but before

they could fly to their arms or place themselves in a posture of defence, they were overpowered by numbers, and dragged to the ground. The Emir beheld with astonishment the havoc already committed by the Christians in the dungeon, and easily divined their whole plan, while he fervently rejoiced in the accident which had alone prevented the completion of it.

Eschenbach gnawed his lips in silent despair, a feeling in which his companions sincerely joined, though they disdained to utter a complaint, or offer a word to deprecate the indignation of the infidels. The barbarity with which they were treated, the massive chains with which they were loaded, affected them not; but their hopes frustrated in the very moment of completion filled them with horror. 'Friends,' said Eschenbach at length, 'let us bear this stroke like men. If we have not succeeded in saving those so dear to us, we shall at least enjoy the melancholy satisfaction of dying with them and for them.'

The Emir ordered the prisoners to be conducted to the hall of audience, where he wished to hear their confession, and learn the extent of the plot, as also the road which the Tyrian merchant had taken. But the knights scorned to return an answer to his demands, and bore without shrinking the various tortures he inflicted to force their confession.

The barbarian could not behold without astonishment, and a mixture of compassion, the calm heroism with which even the old priest bore the rack, and, finding that fear or pain were alike incapable of extracting the slightest murmur from their lips, ceased to torment them, and, having caused them to be removed into separate dungeons, over which a guard was placed, he dispatched a courier to Corradin with an account of what had occurred, and requesting his orders as to the future treatment of the prisoners.

The courier, although he used the utmost dispatch, could only reach Cappadocia in a month, and, on his arrival, found the Sultan retiring before the victorious rebels, and but ill prepared to hear such intelligence. His breast, already boiling with indignation and shame, blazed into fury on reading the Emir's dispatches, and in the first burst of passion, he

determined that all the prisoners should be instantly put to death. But on reflection he thought that this was not sufficient to satiate his revenge, and resolved to glut himself with the spectacle of their agonies.

He therefore dispatched another Emir with powers to supersede the former one, whom he ordered to be confined in the dungeon from whence he had permitted Zealano to escape, till he should have time to deliberate on his future punishment. As to the Christian prisoners, he commanded them to be removed individually, and without permitting them to know the destiny of the others, to the fortress of Thabor, where they should be confined in separate dungeons, and fed upon the coarsest fare.

These orders were punctually executed on the arrival of the new Emir at Dan. Each of the prisoners, as he was brought forth, believed that he was going to execution, and hailed with rapture the termination to all his earthly sufferings, and felt painfully surprised on finding that he was only to change his place of confinement. The guards who conducted them had been strictly prohibited from answering questions or giving any information whatever to the prisoners, by which precaution Frederick and Henry were saved the additional pang of knowing that their wives and generous friends participated in all their sufferings.

The dungeons to which they were now conveyed were, though more secure, much less gloomy than those they had left. They were cut from a solid dry rock, and were less damp, the windows larger, and the current of air more refreshing and wholesome.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHILE they languish in sorrow and despondency, vainly invoking the approach of death, we must leave them for a while and return to their more fortunate friends who had by this time reached Sicily in safety. The young monarch, beholding the banner of the Lion displayed from the galley that had just entered the harbour, hastened on board to welcome those friends for whom he entertained so sincere an esteem. Most acute was his sorrow and disappointment when he perceived so few in Lewis' train and missed Frederick, for whom he felt the real affection of a son; but when he learned the uncertainty which attended the fate of a man to whom he considered himself as lying under such obligations he could not refrain from tears.

He insisted upon receiving the knights of the Lion with Bertha and Adelaide in his own palace, where they continued for several days and where he would gladly have detained them for some time longer had he not respected the anxiety which induced them to continue their journey towards Swabia.

'Do not forget me in the joy of meeting with your friends,' said he to the knights as they bent their knee in taking leave; 'to you am I indebted for the happiness I now enjoy, and the crown I wear, and to the same valour I may yet owe the Imperial diadem; then perhaps may I find an opportunity of repaying the debt of gratitude and prove that I have not been altogether unworthy of your benefits.'

Thus saying he led Lewis aside and expressed a wish of becoming a member of their noble order, as he could now with safety quit his dominions for a few months, and his active

mind pined in inactivity. Much as Lewis felt the honour which must accrue to the order of the Lion by the acquisition of so noble a member, he feared to give a decided answer till he should have consulted his father, and therefore promised to let the young King know immediately after his return to Germany whether Count Farnsburg could, by the statutes of the order, receive the high honour which his Majesty intended to bestow on them; while Frederick bid him inform the Count that, unless his rank put a bar to his reception, he could early in the spring claim admittance to the Castle of the Lion, not as a King, but a private guest, who wished to remain unknown.

Conveyed in one of the royal galleys, the wanderers reached the shores of Italy in a few hours, and without waiting to refresh themselves hastened on their journey, happy in once more treading the soil of Europe.

Already had winter spread his frozen pennons o'er the plains of Swabia and arrested in its course the torrent of the mountain, when the little troop reached their native land. No bird was heard to sing from the leafless trees, universal desolation frowned on every side, but to their eyes the prospect appeared far more enchanting than the vine-clad plains and perfumed groves which they had left behind them. With the tenderest joy did they greet the well-known oaks under whose shade they had often exercised their infant sports, nor did they seem to feel the icicles and snow which a north wind now shook from their giant limbs. Even the heart-broken Bertha threw back her widow's veil, and as she breathed the chilling air, seemed to feel revived by its rude breath.

As they reached the village the serfs, roused by the trampling of the horses' feet upon the ice, quitted their blazing wood fires to fly to the door, and recognising their young lord rent the air with their shouts.

The venerable Castle now lay before them. Lewis, unable to speak, seized the hands of Adelaide and Bertha, and pressed them to his throbbing heart, while their mingled tears fell in silence.

They had gained the rise of the hill when Lewis com-

manded the banner of the Lion to be unfurled. Its crimson folds undulated in the breeze and was marked by the sentinel from the barbican.

The shrill trumpet echoed from the walls, and the stag-hounds, scenting their young master, sprang upon his steed and attempted to lick his feet. Lewis would have called to them by their names, but his heart was too big for utterance, and he could only pat their rough foreheads. But a scene more tender and alas! far more distressing yet awaited them. An exaggerated account of their sufferings had ere this reached the Castle of Farnsburg.

The Countess, already enfeebled by sickness, unable to contend with the heavy stroke, had fallen a prey to grief, and Farnsburg, summoning all his strength, had risen from his sick-bed and was brooding over her coffin in silent though indescribable sorrow, when the blast of the trumpet and the sounds of joy, amid which he could recognise the name of his son, reached his ear.

Supported by his attendants he tottered to the casement, but when he saw the banner of the Lion, when he recognised the children of his heart, joy, so long a stranger to his bosom, poured upon him in such a flood of bliss that he nearly sank under it. A burst of tears at length came to his relief while he dropped upon his knees with uplifted hands. Then summoning all his courage he brushed the moisture from his eye, and in a voice scarcely articulate attempted to shout the old challenge: 'Is this the step of the Lion?'

CHAPTER XXIII.

Lewis recognised the faltering voice of his beloved parent, and shouted: 'It is, it is! He has returned from Palestine languishing for a father's blessing.'

'Oh, thou art indeed welcome!' exclaimed the venerable old Count, with increased emotion; 'hasten then that I may bless thee ere my faculties sink under excess of joy.' Lewis, unmindful of the crowd which gathered round him to hail his return, seized the hands of Adelaide and Bertha and rushed forward and sank at his father's feet.

The feeling heart will easily picture to itself the sensations which all experienced at that moment, and to those who cannot imagine it, it were vain to attempt a description. When the first transports were over, Bertha inquired for her mother. Farnsburg, deeply affected by the question, hesitated for some time and then answered: 'We have enjoyed happiness enough and must therefore learn to bow to the chastening rod. You have yet, my children, a bitter cup to swallow. Come then and mingle your tears with mine.'

As he spoke he conducted them to the coffin of the Countess. Lewis and Bertha gave a shriek, and threw themselves upon the inanimate corpse. 'Wait, my children,' cried Farnsburg, 'I have yet to execute her last request.

'When the tidings of your death had laid us both prostrate on the bed of sickness, feeling her last hour approaching, your mother, who is now, I trust, a saint in heaven, requested anxiously to see me. I was accordingly carried to the side of her couch, where I knelt in silent sorrow.

'A hectic flush like the blush of infant health passed across her cheek, while she said: "I have been blessed by

the sight of our first-born in a dream, when he told me he was hastening with his sister to receive my last embrace, but I fear they will arrive too late. Then bless them for me." As she spoke she raised her hands to heaven, and expired uttering your names.

'Kneel, then, my children and receive the last pledge of a mother's affection.' Overcome by the scene Lewis and Bertha remained for a long time leaning on the coffin of the Countess, till old Farnsburg bade them think of their father who required all their comfort. Lewis pressed his aged hand to his lips, and led him to the hall, where they were followed by the rest of the weeping party.

After a long pause, the old man said: 'I have not yet dared to inquire for my little Agnes, and the husbands of my girls. I trembled lest the question might embitter the joy I felt in seeing you, but now let me know the worst, Do I behold around me all that remains of my gallant friends?'

Lewis answered that their loss had indeed been great. He trusted those most dear to him yet lived to reward his affection, although a mystery, which they had been unable to clear up, still hung over their fate.

The old man thanked God even for the hope that was left to them, and then desired Lewis to give him an account of all that had occurred since they parted.

Lewis complied with his request while the whole family gathered round his chair and watched with anxious attention.

In listening to the events of the campaign, often did the old man's cheek glow with rapture when his imagination followed his sons into the heat of the battle, and as often did it turn pale when he shuddered at the sufferings of the women and trembled for their lives. But when the fate of Weisenborn was related, the tear started into his eye. 'His death was glorious,' he cried, 'and God in His infinite mercy will judge the intention and not the deed itself. Weep not, my Bertha, to thee do I owe the honour of calling such a man my son, then come to my heart that I may thank thee for the gift. In my chapel will I rear a monument to his memory,

and all the badges of our order shall be suspended to the marble with this inscription: "He wore them not, but he deserved them all."'

Ere Lewis could bring his fatal narration to a close, it was already late. The old Count dismissed his children, and although he had pretended to participate in the hopes of Adelaide and Bertha for the safety of their friends, in his own mind he feared the worst, and offered up a silent prayer for the unfortunate Frohburg.

Early on the following morning, the inhabitants of the Castle were awoke by the loud notes of a trumpet, and Frohburg, rushing into the apartment of Adelaide, clasped her in his arms with parental fondness, exclaiming: 'Almighty God, I thank Thee that Thou hast at least restored one of my beloved children to my longing arms; nor will I embitter the cup of bliss, but drain it to the dregs ere I venture to inquire if my tears are destined to flow for my gallant boys.'

The good old man, who had been long watching for tidings from Palestine, learned that some knights of the Lion had passed through Switzerland, and, regardless of the distance, almost unconscious of the driving storm, had ridden night and day, and thus reached the Castle so soon after the arrival of the travellers, to the inexpressible joy of Adelaide, who had been forced to yield to her husband's wish of visiting the Castle of the Lion first, although determined to have hastened to Frohburg as soon as the Countess's obsequies should be performed. When the old man at length obtained from Lewis a full narration of all that had occurred in Asia, he who had often wept over the supposed death of his sons now eagerly grasped at the faint hope which the mystery of their fate afforded.

The meeting of the two venerable warriors was inexpressibly affecting when old Farnsburg tottered into the room; unable to give vent to the mingled feelings of the moment, they sank into each other's arms and wept aloud.

At length Farnsburg mustering all his courage said: 'Well, my old friend, let us thank that wise Providence which has not withdrawn its supporting arm. Our joy, for wise purposes, is

poured out drop by drop, lest our strength should have proved insufficient for the whole load of bliss. I, too, have had the cup dashed with bitterness, and you come to mingle your tears with mine over the bier of a beloved wife. You, who have already felt the stroke, need not be told how awful are the sensations of the husband while obliged to follow to the narrow house the ashes of her who had softened the sorrows and shared the few comforts of his earthly pilgrimage.'

Towards noon the whole nobility from the neighbouring district were assembled, and the melancholy procession moved towards the chapel, followed by the serfs and vassals belonging to the order. They wished once more to behold the face of her who had been a mother and a friend to everyone, and whose bounty had extended to all. As the corpse was carried, according to the custom of the times, upon an open bier with the face uncovered, the multitude pressed on to snatch a last look, and amidst their sobs poured out their prayers and blessings on her sacred memory.

Old Farnsburg, summoning all his fortitude, had followed thus far without shrinking, but when the coffin was lowered into the vault, when the massive stone was rolled over it to enclose those dear remains, his strength forsook him, and he fell insensible into the arms of his son.

On their return to the Castle after performing the last sad office to the deceased Countess, a magnificent banquet was prepared in the great hall, where all the guests of the higher order were assembled. Among these appeared an old knight clad in an iron wove corslet which fitted close to his person, and over it a huge cloak of wolf-skin, after the fashion of the time of Charlemagne. His grey locks were seen from beneath his steel bonnet, and an immense beard of the same colour flowed down to his girdle. There was a particular wildness in his eyes, and his whole appearance showed him so unlike anything of this world that everyone shrank from his approach.

Without attempting to speak to anyone he seated himself at the lower end of the table, and, neither bending his head to the right nor to the left, seemed to gaze upon vacancy.

His presence appalled those who were placed near. They retained a solemn silence, and, although they shuddered to look upon the mysterious guest, he appeared to possess the properties of the rattlesnake, as they found it impossible to turn their fascinated eyes from him. Those who were placed at a greater distance beheld the stranger with equal surprise, yet believing him to be some ancient retainer of the family, or relation of the deceased, feared to make any inquiries, nor had he escaped the notice of Farnsburg, who from time to time looked towards him with sensations of surprise not unmixed with dread; but as hospitality was in particular practised on funeral occasions, he dreaded giving offence by any inquiries and stifled his curiosity for the present, which he hoped to gratify at the close of the feast.

It was a general custom at meetings of this kind for every guest to drink to the memory of the departed, and then to turn the goblet downwards, and if in so doing a single drop should fall, the superstition of the age regarded it as a warning that fresh tears would soon be called for, and another member of the same family ere long be summoned to the grave. Farnsburg, true to the practices of his forefathers, as soon as the baked meats were removed, called for the golden cup. The goblet twined with mistletoe and yew was presented, and each guest emptied it to the bottom, taking care that not the slightest moisture even should remain.

When the cup came in turn to the stranger, every eye instinctively followed it. He rose up, and looking round the table for the first time, said in sepulchral voice: 'I cannot flatter like these, but must display the truth. Then force me not to take the cup, which I would rather pass.' 'Noble guest,' cried Farnsburg, 'you must pledge us. I have ever loved truth and will not shrink from it, under whatever guise it come.' 'So be it, then,' said the stranger as he raised the cup to his lips. He seemed to drain it to the bottom, but when he reversed it on his nail two torrents of wine flowed from it and crimsoned the table. The guests started up in horror, and as if mechanically, each seized the hilt of his sword, while the old man seated himself calmly at the board,

adding: 'I knew it would be so, but you would urge your fate.'

Farnsburg turned towards him with a melancholy smile, saying: 'If the book of fate has destined these tears to flow for me, I have long stood ready to shake hands with death, and can quit this world without a sigh, but with you, venerable stranger, I must become better acquainted. You have excited my wonder, and to your courtesy I trust to have it gratified; for this night, at least, I hope you will honour me by being my guest.'

The stranger bowed assent, and all rising from the table approached according to the custom to shake hands with the Lord of the Castle.

In vain Farnsburg awaited the salutation of his mysterious guest. He had disappeared, no one saw him leave the room, the guards who were placed at the gates declared that no person had passed, and in vain he was sought for through every apartment of the Castle. The women, terrified and in dismay, crowded together into one corner of the hall, convinced that a ghost had sat at the board with them. Many of the men openly avowed the same belief, and those who did not choose to speak their fears inwardly owned the same horrid thought.

When the hour of supper arrived every eye was turned towards the folding doors in trembling expectation, but the stranger did not appear.

An apparent tranquillity was once more restored, but their fears which had been only hushed and not extinguished returned as the hour of retiring for the night drew near. Lewis offered to lead his father to his apartment, but the old man declined his help while he smilingly said: 'Go with thy wife, my boy, lest her apprehensions should again deprive me of the happiness of pressing a grandchild to my bosom ere I sink into the grave.' Adelaide hid her blushes in her husband's breast, but felt grateful for the old man's care, while he desired two of his attendants to conduct him towards his apartment.

Ere he could reach his bed-room, which was situated in a remote angle of the Castle, he had to traverse a long gallery obscurely lighted by loop holes, from which branched off a

passage terminated by a flight of steps leading to the chapel. As he passed this opening he thought he perceived by the expiring light of a lamp, which flared in the wind, the figure of the stranger knight standing in a pensive attitude on the upper step of the stair. His dark figure was hardly distinguishable through the obscurity, but the glare of the lamp fell full upon his emaciated features, which could not be mistaken.

'When the Count, startled at this apparition rendered more awful from the circumstances of the moment, paused to observe its appearance, the figure moved not, nor seemed to mark his presence, while the dark folds of the figure's drapery could be seen waving in the gust that howled along the dark passages. Farnsburg at last, pointing to the spot where the apparition stood, inquired of his attendants if they did not remark anything. They turned their eyes to the place and answered: 'Nothing but a lamp which seems to be expiring,' and they asked if they should trim it.

'Do so,' replied the Count, 'and return immediately.' They descended the stair and passed close by the object of the Count's alarm without appearing to notice anything, although the lamp which they carried shone directly on his face. He seemed to awake from a trance, and waving his long bony hand pointed towards the chapel as if inviting Farnsburg to follow him.

At that moment the attendants returned with the oil, but the old man determined to follow the mysterious stranger even while he believed him for certain to be an inhabitant of the other world. He desired them to wait till he should retire to the chapel to offer up his evening prayers. As he descended the steps the figure seemed to flit before him till it paused opposite the large folding doors of the chapel. The gates flew open at the approach of the stranger, and the Count with astonishment beheld the chapel magnificently lighted up, and the marble slab which had been placed but a few hours before over the remains of the Countess now rolled back.

The stranger moved silently forward till he stood over the yawning gulf and then turning to the old man who looked on in silent horror thus addressed him:

'Thou hast granted me hospitality for this night, and I have summoned thee here to repay the obligation. Truth was ever welcome to thee, thou saidest, under whatever guise it came, then prepare thine eyes, for thou shalt not only hear but see it to its fullest extent. But there are yet others who must participate in the sight; then pause, I charge thee, till I have called them.'

As he spoke he retired behind one of the massive columns and seemed to melt into air. In a few minutes he, however, again appeared from the opposite aisle accompanied by Frohburg, Lewis, Bertha and Adelaide, who fixed their eyes now on their conductor, and now upon the vault, with looks of the most indescribable alarm. It was with the greatest difficulty that the women could be supported to the edge of the grave, as their limbs almost sank under them, while the cold dews like those of death stood glistening on their foreheads. No one dared to utter a syllable had their fears even allowed, till at length the stranger pointing to the open vault thus addressed them in a voice that seemed to thrill to the marrow of their bones:

'In me you behold the parent stem of Farnsburg from whence the various branches that have for ages mouldered within this charnel-house are sprung. For the crime done in my youth I am condemned to suffer pains, the bare mention of which would scathe you like a bolt of heaven, till the last scion of my stock be laid in the cold grave; still as a leaf decays am I permitted to revisit the realms of light in the garb I used to wear to sit at the funeral banquet. This day the Angel of Death granted another respite to my sufferings, and I behold with pleasure the term of my eternal release fast approaching, when my soul may wing its way to heaven. But alas! the dreadful penance I have suffered has not yet cleansed my soul of all its earthly passions. The ties of nature still cling to my heart and I dread to see my latest son condemned to share my pains.

'For this, old man, my soul still lingers in the realms of day to warn you of the dreadful gulf on which you totter. Know, then, that the souls most dear to thee stand shivering

on the verge of Paradise, to which no entrance can be granted while their bones lie drifted o'er and bleaching in the burning sands of Palestine and denied the rights of burial. Thy pride—accurst has it been—has driven them forth, thy damned oaths have left them to perish in a land of infidels, where no friendly hand was found to close their eyes, no passing bell, no solemn prayer or holy rite to ease their troubled souls, or pave the way to heaven.

'The Eternal Judge compassionating their misguided zeal, has delegated me to yield them rest within this vault, ere it be closed over the last son of Farnsburg. You are allowed to behold the horrid scene; may heaven grant that it should serve as a warning to save your wretched soul.' As he spoke, a door which was never opened, unless a coffin was to enter the church, now flew back with a thundering noise. A shriek escaped from the fainting females, while all turned their fear-stricken eyes towards the spot. At the same moment the lofty tapers which blazed upon the altar were extinguished, while a pale blue flame burst from the open vault.

By the ghastly glare which the subterranean fire emitted, the agonised spectators beheld nearly a hundred knights, clad in armour, approach. They wore the different badges of the Lion, and the beavers of their helmets being raised showed the last stages of perishing mortality; but, though the skulls were nearly fleshless, the eye-balls remained in their sockets and glared in fury as they glided past old Farnsburg, pointing to wounds on several places of their bodies from which the blood seemed yet to trickle. The phantoms then sank into the vault uttering an audible sigh.

When all these had disappeared, two spectres approached having each a female leaning on his arm, one of whom seemed to bear the emaciated body of an infant. They were unarmed, and their garments rent in many places exhibited the naked bones starting through the lacerated flesh. The women were yet more dreadful, their breasts being cut off, and their delicate limbs exhibiting the effects of the horrid rack. The features were so dreadfully distorted and concealed by their long locks, which hung over them clotted with blood and the

substance of their brain, that there scarce remained a semblance of the human form.

When these awful spectres reached the spot, where the knights had sunk upon their knees, while the women, blessed by a temporary suspension of their life and sensibility, lay unconscious at their feet, the old wizard commanded them to stop, and turning to Farnsburg demanded if he knew the awful visions. 'I do not,' he replied, while the cold dew rolled down his blanched face.

'Dost thou then know them?' he cried, addressing Frohburg.

'My foreboding heart whispers what I fear to utter,' answered the agonised old man.

'The forebodings of a father's heart are seldom fallacious,' resumed the wizard. 'These were once your sons, and these mangled visions their once lovely brides. Mark how they have suffered, but their trials are now past, and they shall find rest.' As he spoke, the spectres descended, and the subterranean fire vanishing, the tapers on the altar were again lighted by some invisible power.

'See,' said the stranger, addressing Farnsburg, 'such, old man, are the dreadful fruits of thy misguided zeal.

'These heroes were all nursed in the lap of Germany, and thou wert bound by oath to confine their valour to their native soil, but, false alike to God and man, thou hast moistened the Syrian desert with their blood. Miserable worm of the earth, didst thou imagine that the Most High would use thy helpless arm to assist the workings of Providence? Short-sighted mortal, didst thou dream that the lightning of heaven was extinguished because the thunder did not growl? Know that the Holy Land is given for a time to the unbelievers to punish the Christians of Asia for their impieties which called to heaven for vengeance, even from the spot where their Redeemer had bled for them.

'The ways of Providence though mysterious are unerring. Repent then while it is yet time, make penance and weep over thy impious vow, and, if thou would'st seek peace with thy offended God, swear that no member of thy order shall ever wield his arms in Palestine.'

Farnsburg, kneeling on the cold stones, took the oath required, while voices issuing from the vault by which he knelt answered, 'Thy oath is registered in heaven, and hell stands yawning for the perjurer's soul.'

Frohburg, appalled and trembling, ventured to inquire the manner of his wretched sons' destruction. 'Their fate was merited,' replied the frowning inhabitant of the grave. 'They had robbed the Sultan Corradin of a beloved wife and bore her off to Sidon, but the Almighty to punish the perfidy of his children delivered them into the hands of the infidels by whom they were put to death with tortures almost unheard of.

'Thus ingloriously perished your sons and daughters; but yours, old man,' turning to Farnsburg, 'was the fault, and yours must be the task of atonement. Go then, the avenging spirit again summons me to torments which I must endure till I am recalled to the realms of day by the funeral bell of your fast sinking house.'

As he spoke the awful monitor sank into the vault. The lights were extinguished with a loud hissing noise accompanied by a sulphurous smell, and the terrified sufferers tottered to the gate unable to speak or support each other, and almost unconcious of the presence of their pallid attendants who, terrified at their long absence, waited with lights to conduct them to their apartments. It was in vain they sought to sleep, or steep their senses in forgetfulness. A sort of torpid insensibility, which, however, far from blunting their misery, rendered it only more acute, had taken possession of their minds, and if for a few moments they sank into an uneasy slumber, the dreadful visions of the night seemed to gather round their couches and shriek in their ears.

CHAPTER XXIV.

At the earliest dawning of day, Farnsburg summoned all the knights of his order. The pale livery of death which sat on his countenance, the trembling accents of his voice, seemed to forebode tidings of woe, and the assembled warriors stood with their eyes fixed upon their venerable commander in awful expectation.

He unfolded to them the horrid secrets of the preceding night, and earnestly requested them, in compliance with the oath which had been forced from him, to receive as an irrevocable regulation of their order, that no member of it should ever again carry arms in the Holy Land.

The knights gladly acceded to his wishes, as their first expedition had robbed them of too many valuable members to make them regret the prohibition. 'With all my heart, my noble friends, do I thank you,' said the old man, 'and your compliance will smoothe the pillow of death, and make me appear with more confidence before the throne of the Almighty, to which I am fast hastening. But another load still weighs at my breast and shuts the door against the approach of heavenly peace.

'Without your knowledge or consent I have entered into stricter bonds of union with the Black Order, and have even given them hopes of entirely incorporating our body with theirs. The oath demanded by the dreadful spectre has rendered this impossible, and I beseech you to send for their commander that I may be released from an engagement which hangs over my breast like a burning dagger.

'He was in the Convent of the Benedictines a few days ago, and I trust in God may still be found there. Haste then

my friends, and summon him quickly, for the hand of death weighs heavy on me, and I would willingly avail myself of the short time that may yet be granted me in procuring peace to my wretched soul.'

The knights hastened to obey the orders of their leader, whom they regarded as a tender father whose comfort they would have thought cheaply purchased by their own blood.

"The heart-broken Frohburg sat the silent picture of despair. In the grave of his gallant sons his peace was buried for ever, and the sight of Adelaide only added to his misery, by every moment recalling the nature of his loss. The spectres which he had seen in the chapel continued to haunt his steps. At night they gathered round his pallet and placed themselves in the empty seats by him at table. Their blood mingled with the cup which he raised to his lips, while the wretched Clara and her murdered babe, pointing at their wounds, seemed to bar the road to Paradise, when starting up he would cry: 'O dreadful visions! a little time and I will follow you'—and then sank insensible on the floor.

Serious fears were entertained for the life, but still more for the senses of this unfortunate father, whose mind had received a shock on that fatal night which threatened to unhinge his reason for ever.

Two days elapsed without bringing any comfort to the inhabitants of the Castle, but on the third the knights returned accompanied by the leader of the Black Order. Farnsburg appeared to receive some relief in his presence, and immediately related to him the horrors he had witnessed, and the vow he had been induced to make. But the Black Knight, far from participating in his fears or belief of supernatural agency, hesitated not to declare that he had been the victim of some infamous imposition practised on his credulity. He was versed in all those mysteries by which effects the most extraordinary and repugnant to the general laws of nature may be produced by physical causes, and were in fact often practised in their order to rouse the terrors of their candidates. He offered to account for the wonders which had startled them, provided Farnsburg would give him

leave to examine and investigate the whole transaction, in order to do which he begged permission to visit the vault which had been the chief scene of the deceptions. This Farnsburg would at first by no means allow, but at length, overcome by the persuasions of the commander, in which the others joined, he granted a reluctant assent.

As the expectations of all were roused and their fears considerably abated by the insinuations of the Black Knights, the whole of the male inhabitants of the Castle, with the exception of the two old Counts, who were incapable of leaving their couches, proceeded towards the chapel. The massive marble flag was once more removed from the entrance of the vault, and, although several of the knights almost repented of their curiosity, they were ashamed to acknowledge their apprehensions, and being furnished with torches descended into the abode of corruption. With the utmost attention did they search among the mouldering coffins which were ranged on marble tables totally uncovered, but no appearance could be seen of the knights who had fallen before Cesaria, and according to the spectre's declaration found a resting-place within this vault.

This circumstance greatly diminished their faith in the apparition, and increased their hopes in the same proportion. With renewed courage, therefore, they continued their search, which was soon rewarded by discovering in a corner concealed beneath some rubbish several garments stained with gore, and on further scrutiny Lewis pulled forth the entire dress worn by one of the female spectres, marked in several places with red paint so as to resemble blood.

The leader of the Black Knights now triumphed, and all rejoicing in the almost certainty of the delusion which had been practised upon them, wished to hasten with the intelligence to the two fathers, but the prudent old knight desired them to remain till they should have obtained more satisfactory evidence which he doubted not ere long to procure.

The impressions of footsteps were evidently distinguishable upon the moist sand with which the floor of the vault was strewed, and, holding their torches to the ground, they

followed these traces till they terminated at the wall on the north side of the building. Here an opening had evidently been effected and recently made up again from the outside, as the interior was rough and unlike the rest of the wall, and the lime still fresh and moist. The stones, but ill-cemented, yielded to the pressure of the knights, and tumbling outwards left an aperture through which some of them easily forced their bodies. At first they were unable to conceive the nature or situation of the place they now found themselves in, which seemed to be a low vaulted passage. But as they advanced they discovered some small grated loopholes in the roof, through which a current of air rushed, and recognised the subterraneous passage which nearly encircled the whole of the building, and served as a place of retreat and a means of sallying out when the fortress was besieged.

The floor being paved, they lost all traces of the footsteps, but near the sallyport, which opened upon the rock behind the Castle, they picked up another of the dresses and a sword, the blade of which had been evidently fashioned at Damascus. Satisfied with their discoveries, they hastened back to the Castle and revived the drooping courage of the old men and their daughters by a circumstantial account of all they had witnessed.

In the dress which had been found near the gate, Frohburg recognised to a certainty the apparel worn by his supposed son, and in spite of his weakness insisted on being carried into the vault that he might witness with his own eyes the certainty of the deception.

The examination dispelled every doubt, and a tear of joy bedewed his aged eyes, while he raised his hands to heaven, offering up the humble thanks of a grateful heart.

When their first emotions had in some degree subsided, and they had begun to recollect and canvass all the circumstances attendant on this mysterious business, Farnsburg remembered that the two attendants who accompanied him when he first beheld the supposed apparition in the passage leading to the chapel must have been accomplices in the deception, as they pretended not to see the spectre, although

they passed and touched it on the stairway. But on desiring them to be called that they might be examined in his own presence, the steward informed him that they and six of the other servants had disappeared from the Castle on the day following his visit to the chapel, and had never been seen since. No discovery could be obtained from any of the other menials, who were sincerely attached to the Count, and had been long in the family, whereas those who had fled had only been lately admitted from motives of pure compassion, as they had represented themselves to be the followers of the knights who had fallen before Cesaria, and were, in fact, the first bearers of the fatal news. Everything tended to confirm their suspicions of imposture.

On the following day, the huntsmen, who had been absent for some time in quest of venison, brought intelligence that on the evening of the Countess's funeral they had discovered upwards of a hundred horses grazing in the forest, guarded by several grooms who were clothed in uncommon dresses, and spoke a language totally unintelligible to them. The forest-keepers supposed them to belong to some of the numerous guests who had assembled to attend the funeral, but still, being surprised at the strange appearance of their servants, resolved to watch in the neighbourhood. About daylight on the following morning they had perceived a troop descending from the hill on which the fortress stands, when the strange grooms hastened to saddle the horses, which were richly caparisoned, and the company consisting of knights and ladies having come up, they all mounted and set off at a full gallop on the road leading to Switzerland.

No doubt could now remain that these knights, whoever they were, had been the actors in the infamous deception, which had occasioned so much grief and terror.

Farnsburg, although rejoicing that his fears had been unfounded, burned with indignation at the deceit which had been practised on him, while the knights vowed to revenge the insult and follow the perpetrators to the gates of hell. The leader of the Black Order also joined in their feelings, and in their desire for revenge, and swore a dreadful oath that he

would never ungird the harness from his back 1 the perpetrators were punished, or that it was proved beyond the possibility of doubt that they could never be overtaken. Then, turning to Farnsburg, he asked him smiling, whether he still insisted upon being released from his engagement.

'Oh no! my kind, my long-tried friend,' cried Farnsburg, 'to you am I indebted for having removed the load of sorrow which must have bowed me to the grave, nor will I ever forget the obligation. Yet I would request that for the six following years at least, as a truce has been concluded in Palestine——'

'I understand you,' interrupted the other; 'you have granted us your assistance during one campaign, which is all we had any right to expect, and whatever we may in future venture to request, we will at least never claim it as a right. As to the vow extracted by an infamous piece of fraud, it can never be regarded as binding in honour, and any bishop will at once absolve you from it; but enough of this; our bond of amity continues—we will first unite our strengths to punish the insult you have received, and afterwards return to guard our country from the hydras who have again reared their heads during our absence.'

'Amen, Amen,' cried Farnsburg, 'and God be with you.'

The order of the Lion had received a considerable accession of members while the half of its knights were shedding their blood in Asia, and in spite of these losses was now in a more flourishing condition than ever.

The Emperor Philip had visited Farnsburg to return his acknowledgment for the timely assistance he had received from him, and in testimony of his gratitude granted him a separate jurisdiction over all Swabia.

Anxious to justify this distinguished mark of favour, Farnsburg had made the utmost exertions, and rejoiced to see numerous warriors enrolling themselves daily under his banner.

His great age had considerably impaired his physical strength, but failing to extinguish the fire of heroism which was wont to animate his actions had cast a milder lustre over

them. Like a magnificent ruin he was still venerable in his decay, and the eye could trace all the sublimity of its former grandeur in the shrunken form which remained, while his innate courage, like the blaze of an expiring lamp, would at times exhibit a fitful flash more brilliant than its steadfast splendour. It seemed particularly to revive at this moment when he discovered that his credulity had been so played upon, and his heart so cruelly and wantonly outraged.

He dispatched messengers to recall such of the members as had been sent forth on secret missions and had already assembled a considerable troop when the leader of the Black Knights arrived with three hundred men.

Before Lewis departed upon this expedition, he remembered his promise to King Frederick, and by his father's desire dispatched a courier to inform him that the honour of his presence was most anxiously looked for at the Castle of the Lion. Old Frohburg also girded on his sword and appeared completely armed on the morning of their departure. His grey locks were once more pressed by the ponderous casque, and his feeble hands braced with a scaly gauntlet. The sternest veterans of the troop were fain to yield to nature and turn away their heads to conceal a tear, when they beheld the old warrior taking most probably a last farewell of his friend ere he departed in search of his sons.

The strangers had been too conspicuous and too numerous for the knights to find any difficulty in following their traces and the party wheeled off towards Switzerland, certain of overtaking them and revenging the insult.

CHAPTER XXV.

LET us now return to the unhappy prisoners whom we left in the dungeons of Thabor, expecting in calm resignation the period when Corradin should terminate their sufferings and execute his long meditated revenge.

The campaign against the rebels which had begun in so unprosperous a manner was now happily ended. The troops of Corradin accustomed to victory soon overcame a mass of irregular and undisciplined men, who, humbling themselves before their Sultan, gave up the ringleaders to his revenge. After the final close of the campaign, and the execution of the rebel chiefs, Corradin remained only two days in Damascus to partake of the feasts given in honour of his victories, and then hastened to the fortress of Thabor, where loud and joyful acclamations hailed his arrival, and penetrated to the dungeons of the wretched prisoners.

They guessed the cause of sounds so unwonted in a place where in general no whisper was ever heard save the clanking of chains or the expiring shrieks of agony. Their suspicions were but too soon confirmed by the stern gaoler who entered to desire them to prepare for death. The knights heard the sentence with a calm and collected dignity, and though the women shrank when their fate was first announced, their courage soon returned, and they determined not to sink under the severest tortures, but show the savage Corradin how Christians, strengthened by faith and the hopes of a blessed hereafter, could view unmoved the approach of death.

Corradin looked smiling on the prostrate Emir, who, while, he kissed his stirrup, assured him that all the prisoners were safe. The Sultan commanded him to follow to his apartment,

where they continued in secret converse till a late hour. Early on the following morning the Emir gave orders for having a scaffold erected in the great hall. 'This,' said he, 'must be completed before sunset.' While the obedient slaves hastened to execute these orders, Corradin indulged himself in the savage pleasures of visiting each of his miserable captives. With looks of anger he entered the dungeons, seeming to feast himself with the sight of his victims. The knights, regardless of his fury, met his looks with composure and that collected courage which innocence and a sense of true religion can alone bestow.

The women knelt at his feet and, with uplifted hands, implored his compassion, but, without deigning to answer them, he retired with mingled looks of fury and contempt. He now approached the dungeon of Adelgunda, but dreading to expose himself to the fascination of her charms he remained for some time at the door irresolute if he should enter, till the desire of increasing his revenge by showing his contempt induced him to reject the secret warnings in his breast.

The door was thrown open, and Adelgunda rose at his approach. Sorrow was deeply imprinted on her still lovely countenance, and the wonted fire of her eyes had given way to a heavenly languor; far more interesting and more powerful at that moment than her former look of pride. Her long raven locks hung neglected, partially concealing her heaving bosom. She attempted to speak, but her emotions choked her utterance, while Corradin shared therein too much to venture to open his lips, till he should have recalled the feelings of wounded love and injured pride. At length Adelgunda summoning all her strength cried: 'Detested author of my sufferings, if you are come the messenger of death, then are you welcome.'

The Sultan hissed rather than spoke: 'Ah, viper, thy poison is now without effect, and I can behold your last convulsive sigh without a pang.'

'Can Corradin, then, be merciful? Thanks, thanks; and would to God that this day were my last!' said Adelgunda.

'Thy wish is granted,' said he. 'To-morrow's sun shall behold thee a prey to the famished vulture.'

'Hear me yet a word,' she said, 'and by that love you say you once bore me, oh, listen to my prayers, and be merciful! Behold me on my knees—nay, spurn me not, for I will cling to thee till you have granted my prayer—but think not I am so base that I would petition for my own life. I have long since made my peace with heaven—but spare the Christian knights! It is their blood alone weighs heavy on my soul. They are innocent—they knew me not when I partook their flight—by all my hopes of happiness I swear they are guiltless! Then let your vengeance fall upon this head. I will bless the blow, and my last sighs shall be heard in gratitude for your generosity.'

'Perfidious woman,' interrupted Corradin, 'art thou still so anxious for the life of thy paramour? Go tell thy tales to those whom thou hast never betrayed; Corradin knows thy Christian falsehoods. Allah! I thank thee my vengeance will be glorious. Viper, I tell thee the Christian slaves shall expire before thine eyes by lingering tortures that death itself shall tremble to behold. By inches shall they expire, their blood shall stream upon thy garments, and their dying groans ring in thine ears.'

As he spoke he rushed from the dungeon to urge by his presence the exertions of his slaves, and before sunset everything was completed. The scaffolding was hung with black cloth. In the centre of it was placed an immense furnace containing two caldrons, one of which was destined for molten lead and the other for boiling oil. Around them were ranged various instruments of torture, knives, pincers, and screws, calculated to produce the most agonising sufferings without extinguishing life.

His zeal, his invention, seemed inexhaustible, and every moment his horrid imagination supplied some new engine of torture.

At a late hour the barbarian retired, but not to sleep. His guards heard him pacing his apartment and uttering dreadful groans the live-long night. When the first rays of the

rising sun fell on the towers of Thabor, the Sultan again appeared to hurry the preparations, while impatience and joy sat upon his brow. The guards, superbly decorated, were drawn up in front of the scaffold. Thirty slaves, with their arms bared up to the elbow and clad in black, were stationed round the furnace to prepare the instruments of torture and bind down the victims.

When all was ready, Corradin seated himself in a corner of the hall which was hung with magnificent carpets. He gave a private signal to the Emir and the horrid scene commenced. Preceded by two of the executioners bearing axes in their hands, and followed by several of the guards, Adelgunda first appeared. She advanced with a firm and steady step, but when she beheld the instruments of torture, when she heard the bubbling of the horrid caldron, her strength forsook her. She turned pale and reeled, till two of the executioners, seizing her by the arms, assisted her to mount the scaffold. She was followed by Frederick, Henry, Eschenbach and the other knights, and last of all by the old priest. They viewed the tyrant as they passed with looks of the most ineffable contempt, and without shrinking contemplated the dreadful engines; but when Frederick and Henry beheld Eschenbach and his brave companions, their features melted into an expression of the tenderest compassion, and they would have rushed into their arms, but the executioners forced them back and prevented all communication.

The gate was once more opened and the guards appeared conducting Clara and Agnes. Frederick and Henry started back and groaned in agony. Their fortitude was gone. The hero was lost in the feelings of the husband when they beheld the objects of their fondest adoration in the hands of a merciless barbarian.

They had thought them safe from all danger, and only regretted the cruel necessity of parting from them without one last embrace; but to meet again—to meet in such a place, to see them expire in agonies—the thought was dreadful! To witness it was beyond the power of nature.

The high-wrought pride, the innate dignity of Frederick,

sank before the immensity of his sorrow; he dropped upon his knees, and, while the big drops of agony rolled down his face, petitioned the barbarian to spare his wife and sister. 'No,' answered Corradin. 'Haughty Christian, you humble yourself in vain. Their doom is irrevocable, and to add to your misery, know it is for you they suffer. You have shown me an example and I will endeavour to follow it. In the field of Cesaria I was your benefactor, I healed your wounds, I treated you as a brother, and unransomed and bound by no oaths I gave you liberty. Now, mark a Christian's gratitude. I had placed my sum of happiness on one single object, had hoarded up one little treasure on which I and my hopes were for ever fixed. I loved. O God, sure no mortal ever loved as I have done! She was the mistress of my soul, the Goddess of my fondest adoration, she was all I possessed in the world, and this your Christian honour basely seduced from me. Think you there are no other tears but yours? I, too, have wept; I, too, have sought for comfort; but my lot was misery. Long ere this my heart would have burst, but that the thoughts of this hour nourished me with the hopes of vengeance. Allah be praised! The dark hour of retribution is at length arrived. When that hour is past I care not if the next witnesses my expiring groans.'

Frederick cried: 'By that God, into whose presence I am about to enter, I swear that my soul shrinks from the thoughts of such ingratitude; but I crave nothing for myself, let me be supposed guilty of all you charge me with, and satiate your revenge on me. I only implore you for those who never injured you.'

Adelgunda here interposed: 'Hear me, tyrant, merciless and cruel; here on my knees I swear——'

'Swear not,' interrupted Corradin. 'Wretched woman, rush not into the presence of thy injured Maker loaded with perjury. You have murdered my peace, but I would not kill your soul.'

Then cried the priest: 'Oh, listen to me at least; I alone am guilty, the plan was wholly mine.'

'I will hear no more. The hour of vengeance is arrived,' shouted Corradin. 'Enjoy the few moments which my clemency yet grants you to take a last farewell of each other and prepare yourselves for death.'

Corradin now hurried away, the guards by his order retired in silence to the end of the hall, and husbands, wives, and friends rushed into each other's arms. They forgot everything around them, they beheld only each other. Futurity disappeared, the present moment alone was remembered, and a gleam of joy for one moment shed its benign ray amidst the universal gloom. The gleam was momentary. The Sultan again approached. The executioners dragged them from each other's arms, and bound them to the dreadful stake.

Urged by the thirst of revenge, Lewis and his companions followed the traces of the mysterious strangers so closely that on reaching the coast of Italy they were actually shown at a distance the white sails of a vessel, in which the objects of their pursuit had a few hours before embarked for Sicily. They procured another vessel to follow them with all possible dispatch, but before they could make the necessary preparations and get to sea, the others had sunk on the horizon.

Nothing, however, could make them abandon their purpose, and with the assistance of their oars and sails they soon reached the port of Messina. Here, however, every inquiry was vain, and they seemed to have lost all trace of the fugitives.

In this emergency, Lewis hastened to King Frederick to claim his protection and assistance. The young monarch, happy in the opportunity of proving his gratitude, immediately dispatched orders to every seaport in his dominions to have the strangers arrested and, not contented with this, insisted upon accompanying his friends, whose impatience could not brook the necessary delay, but hastened to meet the couriers on their return. While engaged in these pursuits, they one morning, at the distance of three days' journey from Messina perceived a vessel of considerable magnitude (and from her build evidently not belonging to the island) lying at anchor in a

small creek which was never frequented but by fishing boats, in case of necessity, to shelter themselves from a storm.

Two sailors were upon deck, and on the approach of the troop began to weigh the anchor; at the same time endeavouring to conceal themselves as much as possible.

The vessel lay so close to the beach that Frederick and the knights having alighted from their horses rushed into the water, and had but a short way to swim ere they were helped on board.

At their approach the sailors exhibited symptoms of the utmost alarm, and, as they refused to give any satisfactory account of themselves, or of the business which had brought them into that unfrequented spot, Frederick ordered his attendants to examine every part of the vessel. On removing the hatches, four bodies still bleeding were found, covered by a piece of an old sail, and they were no sooner brought upon deck than the sailors, falling on their knees, implored for mercy, offering to make an ample confession.

'We live,' said one of them, 'on the coast of Apulia, and have ever gained our bread fairly and honestly.

'Six days ago an old merchant offered us fifty golden sequins if we would agree to go with him and twenty other sailors whom he had already engaged to convey some contraband goods from Sicily. The sight of so much gold tempted us, and we agreed.

'The vessel which he had provided was ready at a neighbouring port, and a favourable breeze soon wafted us over. The merchant, who was apparently intimately acquainted with all these coasts, acted himself as pilot, and brought us last night into this creek. On our arrival a dispute arose between the padrone and the merchant which I witnessed from a distance, and among other things I overheard the padrone say that he knew the other well, and could ruin him if he chose. This the merchant as strenuously denied, and they continued to dispute in the same manner, mutually accusing each other for a considerable time. Neither my companion nor I interfered in the quarrel or took any share in it whatever, but, when

all the ship's company had retired to rest, the merchant, calling us to a remote part of the deck, offered us fifty sequins each if we would consent to murder the padrone and his three shipmates as they lay asleep, endeavouring to gain us to his purpose by declaring that the padrone had sworn to deliver us all over into the hands of justice, so that instead of receiving our promised reward we should probably be condemned to perpetual slavery, and for ever deprived of the sight of our wives or children. I tremble to confess that his arguments had but too much weight, and we committed the horrid deed. Fearing to heave the bodies overboard so near the shore, we had determined to consign them to the deep as soon as we had got to sea, had not you unexpectedly discovered us. The merchant himself is at present up the country with the rest of the crew to the number of eighteen, and is to return this night with the smuggled goods.'

The King, who immediately upon his accession to the throne had removed all shackles from trade, and allowed a free importation of every species of merchandise, found the recital of the sailor far from satisfactory, and made no doubt that the supposed merchant under this pretence was engaged in some pursuit far more criminal. He accordingly determined to await his return, and, having committed the murderers to the charge of his attendants whom he placed in the vessel, he concealed himself with the rest of the party in some caverns of the rocks, and patiently waited the arrival of the smugglers.

They appeared about midnight, leading a number of loaded mules, and, before they could have the slightest suspicion of the ambuscade which was laid for them, were surrounded and taken prisoners. When the pretended merchant was brought before the young King, in spite of his disguise, he was immediately recognised as Count Zealano.

'Seek not to hide thyself,' said Frederick, as Zealano endeavoured to turn from the glare of the torches, 'I know thee but too well, and little did I dream ever to have met thee under such circumstances.'

'And I,' replied the audacious Count, 'could as little have believed that the once noble Sicilians would have acknow-

ledged the power of a beardless boy, or consented to kiss that rod with which he ought still to have been chastised.'

'Thy foolish speeches I can forgive,' replied Frederick, 'but not that the banished Count Zealano should dare to tread the shores of Sicily, or pollute her lands with the blood of her own children.'

'If you mean the padrone and his sailors,' said the Count, 'I did not imbrue my own hands in blood so base, though I confess they fell at my desire, nor do I repent me of the deed. The sordid wretches had conspired to deliver me up for the sake of that reward which a generous sovereign had set upon my head. I knew their intentions and the law of nature bade me prevent it by the only means in my power. As for my return into your hated states, you know Zealano but little if you think he would stoop to a falsehood, or beg his life from one he does not fear. You know I can behold you and your executioners with equal contempt.

'After losing my only child, after sufferings, with the description of which I will neither indulge your revenge nor seek to excite your compassion, I returned to this place to recover some small portion of my legal property, which I had secreted near one of my Castles. For this have I again trod your accursed land, which but for the sleepless eye of a tyrant I had ere this abandoned for ever.'

'And the immense loads under which these numerous mules are ready to sink,' replied Frederick, 'are the small remnants of an upright minister's honest savings; but this we shall examine anon. And now, Count, the memory of a king should not only retain good actions, but never bear the remembrance of misdeeds, then will I yet act with clemency towards thee; I will only consider thy poverty which made thee return from banishment, the fears for thy own life that made thee imbrue thy soul if not thy hands in blood, and leave to thine injured God the punishment of thy sins, while it shall be my care to wash away in some degree the enormity of thy guilt by providing for the helpless families of the victims of thy revenge. Nor will I deprive thee of the remnant of thy wealth if it be truly such. But, Zealano, may I expect sincerity from thee?'

This speech of the King entirely overcame the hardened sinner, and falling on his knees he exclaimed: 'Oh, my King, you this day celebrate your noblest triumph. You now behold at your feet your once implacable enemy, who defied your utmost threats, won and overcome by your generosity, who confesses that you are truly deserving of that crown which encircles your brows; and is ready to answer with the utmost sincerity whatever questions you may choose to put to him.'

Frederick raised the Count, and begged him to tell what had become of the immense sums of money which he had extorted from the people; and of which he had never given any account.

'Your generosity,' said Zealano, 'shall obtain what no tortures could have drawn from me. Conscious of the detestation of the people, and that the hour of retribution must one day arrive, I had prepared for it by burying these treasures in a place known only to myself, but the storm having burst even sooner than I expected, I was prevented from carrying them with me when your clemency sent me into exile. You behold here only the smallest portion of that ill-gotten wealth, but I will restore all, and trust to your generosity for my future support, while the only favour I shall ask is to be permitted to retire to a convent, and spend the evening of a stormy life in the calm of religious penance.'

Frederick, after promising to take his request into consideration, gave him up to the care of his attendants, and went to take possession of the immense treasures which Zealano's extortions had amassed.

The supply came at an opportune time for the young King, who loved pomp and magnificence, who was by nature inclined to be liberal, if not profuse, and who at this period felt the necessity of purchasing the attachment of additional friends, when his uncle Philip had fallen by the hand of Otto of Wittelsbach. Pope Innocent had laid the ban on his successor Otto the Saxon, so that Frederick had every reason to hope the Germans would acknowledge his right to the Imperial throne could he once appear in a situation to support his claim.

On his return from securing the treasures, Frederick promised Zealano to forget and forgive the past and to place him in a convent under his own immediate protection. The Count, grateful for this clemency, volunteered to gratify the King's curiosity as to the events which had occurred to him since his departure from Sicily. He was sincere and circumstantial in every part of the narration, except in that which regarded Adelgunda, as he pretended that the Sultan had forcibly torn her from his arms, threatening him with instant destruction in case he ever dared approach the town of his daughter's residence.

As he continued his narration, the knights of the Lion, and old Frohburg in particular, crowded around him with anxious and fearful attention. When he mentioned that two knights of their order had saved his daughter from the hands of Corradin and brought her to Sidon, Frohburg recognised in the champions of innocence his gallant sons, and the father's heart exulted, but again he shuddered when their mysterious disappearance from Sidon was related; yet when he learned the means by which Zealano had escaped from the fortress of Dan, where he had reason to believe the rest of the Christian prisoners were confined, and who would most probably be liberated at the same time, his hopes once more revived. But Zealano, from having sailed immediately on reaching the sea coast, without being entrusted by Eschenbach with any of their plans, could only give vague hopes and furnish room for innumerable conjectures, while at the same time he assured the anxious father that even had his brave sons been released from Dan they could not, at that season of the year, have quitted Palestine, on account of the trade winds which had set in before he had lost sight of the shores.

True to his promise, young Frederick on the following day conducted Zealano to his convent, while he condemned the two assassins to the galleys, and sent for the widows and families of those who had been so cruelly murdered that he might provide for them in Sicily.

One whole month was employed in a fruitless search after the ship which had been supposed to convey to the

island the object of the knights' pursuit. No intelligence whatever could be obtained, and Lewis with his companions wished to have returned to Germany, but Frohburg requested for a longer delay, and the King, anxious to detain them, would not permit them to depart. They accordingly dispatched a messenger to Germany with an account of their hitherto fruitless expedition, and consented to remain some time longer at Messina.

Old Frohburg walked daily to the harbour, and would remain there for hours, anxiously watching the appearance of every sail, but his hopes were always disappointed, and the good old man would often return to the palace with the traces of recent tears upon his furrowed cheeks. Moved by the sight, and compassionating the feelings of the noble veteran, Frederick used every persuasion to prevent these daily visits to the shore which only brought a daily disappointment. These but added new stings to his sorrow. Orders were also given that when any ship should enter the harbour from the coast of Syria immediate notice should be sent to him. In obedience to this command the overseer of the port appeared one day when all the knights were seated with the King at table, and brought the welcome tidings that a galley from Sidon carrying several Christian knights (who had long languished in slavery) had that moment come to an anchor. Joy, like an impetuous torrent which bears down all before it, could not even be restrained by the respect due to the presence of majesty, and all the knights, headed by Frohburg, rising from table rushed towards the port, where they inquired in the utmost agitation and breathless impatience for the strangers who had just arrived.

These soon appeared, but their approach brought only anguish to the old Count, as neither of his sons was among the number. One of the strangers, guessing at the cause of his sorrow, which so immediately followed the eager inquiries, approached the old man in the most courteous manner, saying he feared he had expected to meet some dear friend or perhaps relation, but he was sorry to be the messenger of bad tidings, informing him that no other Christian knights remained at

Sidon when he and his companions had sailed. While speaking to Frohburg, the stranger's eye chanced to glance on Lewis's sword, who stood close by him, and turning round he earnestly inquired whether that was not the sword of the Lion, 'for if so I have tidings of moment to communicate to you.'

'Tidings!' cried they all at once, pressing round him, 'heaven grant that they may be favourable!'

'Would to God they were so!' replied the sympathising stranger, 'and were I not bound by a sacred oath, I would not voluntarily dispel these hopes. Yet ere I speak, that I may not be the bearer of unnecessary sorrow, permit me to ask a few questions: Did you expect the arrival of your gallant young leader and his brother?'

'We do! we do!' exclaimed Frohburg; 'I am the unhappy father of these noble youths.'

'Did not their wives accompany them to Palestine?' continued the stranger, 'and did not some of their brethren attempt to rescue them when imprisoned by the Sultan?'

'Yes,' answered Lewis, 'and we had hoped that attempt had been crowned with success.'

'Then,' replied the stranger, 'I fear there can be no doubt, and the cruel duty of blasting these hopes so fondly cherished devolves upon me. A slavery of eleven years under a hard taskmaster had prepared me to hail with rapture the return of liberty, but this moment shows me that even freedom may be dearly purchased.

'At the time when the tyrant Corradin, barbarous even in his mercies, knocked off my chains, he bound us all by the most dreadful oath that as soon as we should reach the shores of Europe, even before we should indulge ourselves in the embraces of our families, we should be the bearers of a message to the knights of the Lion. "Tell them," said the tyrant, "that I hate and curse them. Their valour I once admired, but my admiration was speedly cancelled by their base ingratitude. Their leader, whom I loved as a friend, repaid my affection by suborning the affections of the wife of my bosom, but, Allah be praised! I overtook them at Sidon, and he with his brother and their wives became my prisoners.

'"In less than three days shall they all expire in the midst of tortures that demons never dreamt of, which I will prolong while nature can be sustained by the slightest thread! Tell this to their brothers, and tell them more, that the same end shall await any member of their cursed order that shall fall into my hands.'

Old Frohburg could hear no more, but groaning forth 'O my children!' sank insensible into the arms of Lewis.

The King had by this time joined his friends, and sought by the tenderest compassion to mitigate their sufferings. The only thing, however, which seemed to revive the almost broken-hearted father was a solemn promise that at the expiry of the truce, Frederick would assist with all his power to crush the Asiatic despot, while the old warrior breathed a fervent prayer that the Almighty would preserve his life till he could take a share in the glorious enterprise and drop a tear over the grave of his gallant boys.

No further inducement could now detain the knights in Sicily. They therefore hastened their return to Germany, where the King promised to follow them in a few months. Sorrowful indeed was the journey, while they trod back every part of that road over which they had passed a few months before, in the happy expectation of not only detecting the imposture which had so cruelly affected them, but of returning with the living proofs that the whole had been an infamous deception. Now, alas! these doubts were changed into a horrible certainty, and Frohburg daily shed his tears over the wreck of that noble tree which with a parent's pride he had once beheld stretching its protecting branches over its grateful country.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHILE the result of this unlucky journey filled the hearts of all with sorrow and mourning in the Castle of the Lion, while everyone wept over the memory of a departed friend, while the priest offered up daily masses for the repose of their souls, the Almighty had already taken pity on the sufferers, and suddenly changed the caprice of the tyrant.

At the moment when the executioners had seized their victims, and held the dreadful instruments of torture already prepared, Corradin felt a sudden impulse of compassion towards his prisoners, and a feeling of remorse for his own cruelty. Bidding the executioners stop, he hastened from his seat with that impetuosity which characterised his every action, and, springing on the scaffold, cried 'No! no! vengeance is not sweet,' and ordering his attendants to untie the prisoners he surveyed them all with a serious though placid countenance, and his heart leading him first to Adelgunda, he thus began: 'Thou wert the prisoner of a pirate, and I saved thee from his power; I rescued thee from his brutal lust; I offered thee honourable love; I sued and implored; I waited with patience and submission; I exalted thee to greatness and loaded thee with gifts; I gave thee unlimited power to do good—what was my reward? Cruelty and contempt; shameful perfidy! Thou didst reduce to ashes the palace in which thou hadst reigned, thou gavest liberty to those whose hands were red with the blood of my chosen warriors. Thou hast deserved death a hundredfold, but I cannot be thy executioner. Corradin shall not demean himself to revenge, nor shall he tarnish his unpolluted honour with thy blood.

'Thou art free from this moment. Return to thy country,

and boast loudly there that the hero Corradin, the conqueror of the Christians, was the voluntary slave of thy beauty.' Adelgunda, sinking on her knees, exclaimed, 'O most noble of men!'

'This same man whom you now praise,' interrupted the Sultan waving her back, 'was once thine slave, and laid his heart and his power at thy feet, but thou spurnedst both. Yet see that repentance does not one day avenge my cause on thine own heart.' Saying this, he turned hastily from her, while a tear escaped from his eye, and, approaching Frederick, he said: 'From thee and thy brothers-in-arms I had also expected gratitude; but I will not now enumerate my benefits or the return they met with. The desire of revenge might for a moment tempt, but it could not conquer, the soul of Corradin. Children of the Sun, our feelings and passions are more violent than those of the cold inhabitants of Europe, but, like the sun's heat, our warmth cherishes but does not consume. Return to your country, then; carry your wives with you, and enjoy in their arms the sweetest fruits of love. There you may recount your valiant deeds, but my greatness you can never equal; for I held you in my power, and I forgave you. No, nor can you enjoy the happiness or the triumph I feel at this moment, when I behold those hearts melted which with such stern fortitude looked on the approach of death encircled by torments.

'Here is thy sword, take it back. I wore it in remembrance of thy valour, but I cannot keep it now. It might sometimes occasion painful recollections, and perhaps renew those thoughts I wish to abjure for ever.'

Corradin at these words retired with the utmost precipitation, but he was followed by the grateful beings whom he had now rendered so happy. They overtook him in the Court, where each endeavoured to give vent to his feelings. Corradin, deeply affected, endeavoured in vain to free himself from these effusions of gratitude. At length he cried: 'This is too much, go and be happy. All I ask is that you will not again draw your swords against the man who, oftener than once, spared those lives which were within his power.'

'May shame and dishonour stain this sword,' answered Frederick, 'if I ever draw it against thee.' 'And,' added Clara, 'may curses fall on our children, if ever they appear before thee as enemies.'

Adelgunda pressed forward and attempted to speak, but Corradin cried: 'No! with thee, not a word; I have made a vow which I will not break, nor will I trust that siren voice which might again seduce me, and tear open those wounds which I feel are still bleeding.' Then, addressing the knights, he said: 'Take her with you, and be it your care that her future lot may be happier than mine. And now farewell; I require repose and solitude; go and strengthen yourselves for your approaching journey.'

Several slaves now appeared and conducted the knights and women to different apartments which had been prepared for them by the orders of the Sultan. Then they were left to their mutual endearments, to the enjoyment of their happy reunion. Unexpectedly brought from the highest pitch of misery and horror to that bliss which they had only hoped to enjoy in a better world, 'tis needless to say that the first moments were solely devoted to tenderness, and mutual inquiries about the past, and it was long ere they could persuade themselves to sit down to the magnificent banquet which was prepared for them after so many months of abstinence. At length, however, they placed themselves at the board, each with the object of his love by his side.

Eschenbach was seated by Adelgunda, in whose eye alone the tear of sensibility trembled amid the general joy. As he felt more than common interest in everything which concerned the lovely Sicilian, he anxiously inquired the cause of her evident uneasiness, and she, smiling through her tears, replied that while her heart beat joyfully, while she contemplated the happiness of those so justly dear to her, she could not help feeling that she herself was now an isolated being, a helpless orphan, driven from her native country without one natural protector on earth to look up to for support. Eschenbach tenderly assured her that in Germany she should find a home—a father, and every blessing that can render life desirable.

'Ah, no,' replied Adelgunda, with increased emotion, 'I cannot accompany my friends. Generous as they are, I am certain the sight of me, who was the primary cause of all their sufferings, must ever remind them of those horrid scenes in which they have been involved, and, even should they forgive all the wretchedness I have heaped upon them, their relations and friends never would. I will retire, therefore, to a convent, and spend my future days in solitude.'

Eschenbach was too much interested in the event not to combat this resolution with all the arguments in his power, and now, drawing the attention of the remainder of the party to his conversation with Adelgunda, they all surrounded her, and assailed her with prayers, entreaties and assurances of neverfailing affection. She at length yielded to their generous wishes, and promised to be guided solely by their advice, while Agnes, whose sprightly humour nothing had been able to tame, insisted on nominating a guardian for her to guard her against any future machinations of turbaned lovers. Eschenbach was the appointed guardian.

To this arrangement none of the parties seemed to object, and the old priest and Frederick, who each claimed her as an adopted child, advised her to accept the knight as a protector and guardian on the road, to which Adelgunda amidst smiles and blushes yielded a willing assent.

The conversation now became general, and an anxious wish was expressed by all to hasten their departure, as they longed to fly and comfort those who must ere this have been alarmed and distressed by vague and contradictory accounts of their fate, and perhaps were at that very moment mourning over the supposed deaths of their children. It was therefore determined to crave the Sultan's permission to depart on the morrow; but the priest, who spoke the Arabian language fluently, understood from the attendants that Corradin had left the fortress, and was not to return for several days, during which he had commanded every attention to be paid to the Christians, only that they should not on any pretence be permitted to depart till his return.

This delay was at first felt as a severe disappointment, but

they had soon reason to look upon it as an additional mark of the Sultan's attention, for their strength was by no means equal to any violent exertion after the horrors of their long captivity.

Clara was the first who felt the effects of it on her delicate constitution, and even the knights were not entirely exempt from a considerable degree of languor and weakness, so that eight days had elapsed before they found themselves in a situation to encounter the fatigues of travelling under a vertical sun. At the expiry of this period, Corradin returned and sent to announce to the happy party that all was ready for their departure.

They all wished once more to have thanked the Sultan, and for this purpose requested an interview, but he positively refused to admit them, while at the same time he sent his Emir to wish them every happiness, and to request that they would not forget him when an ocean should intervene between them. Frederick at this moment took Clara by the hand and with her falling on their knees these two first, and then all the others following their example, offered up a fervent prayer for the prosperity of their benefactor. The Emir, moved by the sight, cried: 'I will tell the Sultan this, and I well know his noble heart will feel it as a sufficient reward for all he has done. But come, everything is prepared, and I have orders to accompany you and see you safe to Sidon.

They all followed the Emir to the court where a number of horses and camels laden with baggage were ready caparisoned. The Emir placed two camels behind each horse except one, and this one was a beautiful Arabian horse decked in the most costly trappings. In rear of him he placed six camels which carried their heavy burdens under awnings of rich silk. Then addressing the knights he said: 'Hear now the commands of my master—In this war ye have lost all your property, but, as it became the prize of the victors on the field, it is no longer in his power to restore it. He therefore requests you to accept what is conveyed by these camels as some compensation for your losses. Each of you has, as you see, a horse and two camels. The foremost belongs to your

noble leader, the others you are to take according to your rank.'

Then, holding Adelgunda by the hand, he conducted her to the beautiful palfrey. 'What these six camels carry,' continued the Emir, 'the Sultan destines for your dowry. They consist of precious and rare things sufficient to satisfy the most avaricious, but my master will never feel quite happy till he knows that thy husband, whoever he may be, loves thee with an affection as pure as that which he once experienced for thee.'

The knights and the weeping Adelgunda beheld in silent and grateful admiration this additional proof of Corradin's munificent generosity. Frederick in the name of all once more bade the Emir convey their grateful thanks with the assurance that the remembrance of Corradin should for ever live in his heart. Adelgunda only wept, for she could not speak, and, when she had mounted her horse, proceeded in profound silence, while Eschenbach who rode by her side honoured her feelings too much to attempt to break in upon her reverie.

Towards mid-day the little party dismounted and sought shelter against the rays of a scorching sun under the shade of some palm trees. They were soon engaged in conversation upon the late events, when a troop of horsemen was seen to approach. The knights grasped their swords, while the women clung to them for protection; but the deepest consternation was felt by all when the body-guards of the Sultan were plainly discernible. They halted on reaching the summit of a hill at a little distance, and a single rider, detaching himself from the troop, galloped towards the travellers. It was Corradin, who, flinging himself from his panting steed, with the most anxious looks sought for Adelgunda, and seizing her by the hand, kissed it with transport, and then, looking on her with an expression of the most seducing tenderness, 'You leave me then, willingly?' he said in broken accents; 'you abandon me without hope and without comfort?'

'Thy goodness permitted it,' replied the trembling Adelgunda, 'thy infinite generosity allowed me.'

'Nor will I now prevent thee from following thy inclinations,' interrupted the Sultan; 'the promise which I have once made is sacred, though my heart should break in the trial. But, Adelgunda; dear object of my fond adoration —Adelgunda, you whom I can never dare to love, say, can nothing move you, must I for ever close my eyes against the appearance of happiness in this world?'

'Oh, forgive me, my lord, but I do not understand you,' murmured Adelgunda.

'Then,' said Corradin, 'am I doomed to misery, and thy few words convey the awful sentence. "Do not understand me!" Ah, Adelgunda, there was a time when I had hoped the slightest word, the lowest aspiration of a sigh from Corradin would have found a ready interpreter in Adelgunda's breast. "Do not understand me!" Then misery and I must shake hands. With strength unparalleled have I combated against this heart. I proved its most cruel tyrant. I have even brought myself to think with pleasure on thy death, which would for ever close my hopes. But Corradin, before whom armies fled like the exhalations of the morning, sinks vanquished by his own feelings. When I beheld the executioners seize thee, when I beheld thy lovely bosom heave under the rude grasp of a murderer, I felt as though my whole soul, my very existence, was wrapped in thine. I felt the necessity of forgiving all. Yet, indignant pride made me ashamed of my feelings, and I basely attempted to cloak the triumph of all-mighty love under the name of generosity and virtue. But he now reclaims his empire, and the agony of this moment proves but too well that I cannot exist without thee. I, who could behold the destruction of my empire, the universal wreck of nature without a sigh, played the woman; I wept tears of agony when from a window, where, cowardlike, I had concealed myself, I beheld thee mounting thy horse; and when I saw thee depart without one sigh of regret, without casting one look towards him who lived but in your smiles, I felt like an agonised mother who follows her only child to the silent grave. I flung myself upon a couch and wept aloud. At length I could resist no longer. Love

forced me on thy footsteps, and you behold me now as a wretched beggar, imploring for one little ray of hope to gild my load of misery.'

She said with dignity: 'My lord, I am in thy power; then do with me as may best please thee, and if one victim must languish here, let me be the one, and permit the others to depart in peace.'

Reproachfully he cried: 'Ah, cruel, relentless beauty, you know I would not detain thee by force. I only implore that thou would'st return willingly with me. Have compassion, dearest Adelgunda; return and reign the mistress of my heart, the sharer of my empire. Answer, my beloved, let thy heart speak for me, for that alone can crown my wishes. Say, thou on whom my soul dotes, wilt thou listen to my supplication and return once more?'

There was a pause and then she said: 'Willingly? Forgive me, but my religion forbids me to utter a falsehood. No, willingly can I not return. Be not angry with me; I feel thy goodness and thy generosity, but while I admire these god-like virtues my weak heart refuses to imitate them. I cannot love the man who despises the Being of my adoration, and scoffs at my religion.

She ceased, and he cried: 'Nay! hold, cruel and unfeeling, say no more; thou hast pronounced my death's doom.'

After a moment's silence he rose and continued: 'But 'tis well, perhaps 'tis better so. I thank thee, hard-hearted Christian. No, thou shalt not cause my death, I will yet seek to conquer this rebellious heart, and teach it to despise thee. Farewell, farewell for ever. I entrust my revenge to that supreme Power which we both acknowledge. Thy heart, too, may one day own the pangs of love. Then wilt thou know what it is to hope and languish; but, if retributive justice is to be found in this sublunary world, thou wilt hope and languish in vain. The partner of thy life will be faithless to thee; with scorn and contempt will he repay thy love. Then wilt thou learn to compassionate my sufferings and repent of thy own cruelty.' As he spoke these last words

Corradin seized the bridle of his horse, and vaulting into the saddle was out of sight in a moment.

When the remaining party had in some degree recovered from their surprise, and the women felt released from the fear of Corradin's presence, they hastened to continue their journey, and reached Sidon on the following day. At the gates of the city the Emir, who had hitherto accompanied them, took his leave. At his departure the knights begged him to assure his master that they should never forget his generosity, and Adelgunda, approaching him with streaming eyes, said: 'See these tears; they are sacred to the remembrance of the noble Corradin, and often shall they flow when faithful memory shall conjure up the recollection of his heroic generosity, and would to God I had had it in my power to have rewarded him better.'

It was not till they reached the caravansary that the knights examined the presents of the Sultan. They were truly worthy of their magnificent donor, consisting chiefly of gold, precious stones and richly embroidered cloths, but Adelgunda's dowry exceeded in splendour anything that had been ever before seen. Corradin seemed to have gathered all the riches of the East, and its most precious gems. Everyone was struck with astonishment at such a mass of treasure, and agreed that Adelgunda would far exceed in splendour every courtly dame of Europe. She felt deeply affected at so many reiterated proofs of love from the man towards whom she had exhibited such coldness and even cruelty, while she sincerely wished that he had been less generous.

Eschenbach easily saw how much her grateful heart felt for Corradin, and feared at that moment to urge his suit more particularly as delicacy made him fear that he should be suspected of interested motives in craving her hand, although his own heart fully acquitted him of so base a sentiment; and he felt that even when she was a melancholy and forsaken outcast, with nothing but her beauty and her innocence, she was the only woman capable of banishing the remembrance of the unfortunate Maria.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A VESSEL was found in the harbour ready to sail for Cyprus by the first favourable wind, and Frederick determined to avail himself of this opportunity, without waiting for the uncertain chance of some vessel sailing directly for Europe, making no doubt that at Cyprus they should readily find some other conveyance.

A favourable breeze permitted them to sail from Sidon the very next day. Their passage proved quick and favourable, during which, forgetful of all past sorrow, they anticipated the joy they should feel in meeting with their beloved friends in Europe. The modest Eschenbach could not, in the constant presence of the lovely Adelgunda, keep his resolves. He again ventured to speak of love, and was blessed with the avowal that she could not have resisted the tears of Corradin at their last interview, had she not felt already but too much inclined to listen to her guardian. After this declaration, which gave him hopes of one day becoming possessor of so many charms, Eschenbach was not the least happy among those who, with the most joyful feelings, landed on the perfumed shores of Cyprus; while with infinite pleasure they remarked that, among the numerous vessels which lay in the harbour, one carried a flag denoting departure for Europe. As soon as the women were properly accommodated, Frederick and his companions hastened on board of this vessel, which was infinitely larger than any of the others, and magnificently fitted up. She was filled with German knights and Templars, who said they were bound for Europe. The principal knight among the Templars was a Count Diapold, who said he remembered the knights of the Lion, and was well acquainted

with their story; and, in the most obliging manner, offered to accommodate them and all their retinue on board his ship, which would, he doubted not, convey them safely to the shores of Italy in less than two months.

Frederick gladly accepted his courteous offer, and used the utmost expedition in conveying the women, with all their treasures, on board, where Count Diapold received them with every mark of respect, and before night the ship had already left the harbour.

The number of knights who were on board the vessel, besides Frederick and his companions, amounted to upwards of a hundred, mostly Germans, with a few Italians and Greeks, who, as Count Diapold said, were anxious to visit Germany, from motives of curiosity. The weather was particularly fine, and the knights remained upon deck all day, conversing with their new friends, who seemed to interest themselves particularly in all their sufferings. When night approached, Diapold showed his guests into several small cabins, which he and his friends insisted on resigning in their favour. It was in vain that Frederick resisted, insisting that two were perfectly sufficient for them at any time, far more after having been so long accustomed to infinitely worse accommodation. The courteous Diapold would not yield, and they were obliged, unwillingly, to submit, and soon sank into a profound sleep. Their slumbers were, however, of short duration. A noise of arms, mixed with horrid and confused cries, aroused them; and before they could start from their beds, or discover their weapons in the darkness of the night, they were surrounded by armed Saracens, who, having pinioned down their arms, conveyed them all, both men and women, into a remote part of the great galley, where a strong guard was placed over them.

Unable to comprehend the meaning of this sudden transition, they stared at each other in silent astonishment. It was impossible to believe that a vessel so strongly manned, and so well found in every respect, could have been so immediately overpowered by any corsair, without the intervention of treachery, and some of the knights even ventured to declare

that in the persons of the supposed Saracens they had recognised the faces of the Templars with whom they had conversed on the preceding day. But they were not long permitted to remain in a state of suspense, for at the dawn of day Count Diapold entered the place of their confinement in a Moorish dress, with a turban blazing with jewels, and, addressing them in an ironical tone, said: 'Forgive me, my friends, if I disturbed your rest, but ask your own hearts, and let them answer if your treatment has been unmerited.'

To this insult Frederick proudly answered: 'Our hearts are pure, and say your conduct has been base and ungenerous; but I ask thee how thou hast dared to infringe the sacred laws of hospitality, and thus, assassin-like, assail us helpless and immersed in unsuspecting sleep.'

'I owe you no explanation,' replied Diapold; 'but time will show that I have only acted as duty and prudence required. Meanwhile you must remain my prisoners, and as such I request, for your own sakes, you will quietly submit. See!' said he, opening the cabin door, 'you cannot reasonably hope to conquer this armed force; but should you offer even the slightest resistance, these,' pointing to the women, 'shall pay for your transgressions.' Without waiting their answer, Diapold withdrew, and a guard immediately entered, who unpinioned their arms, but at the same time affixed heavy chains to their legs.

Two weeks were spent in this dreadful state, deprived of air, of exercise, and almost every common comfort. The women began to sicken, and the knights, too, felt the effects of despair upon their constitutions, when they perceived that the vessel had come to an anchor; and, as they looked through a small grated port-hole, they perceived the land quite close to them, and crowds of people in the Asiatic costume walking on the beach.

Two days after, a strong guard entered their cabin, and, desiring them to follow, carried them on shore, where they once more found themselves in that country which they had lately quitted with such rapture. 'Alas!' cried Adelgunda, 'this must be the work of the Sultan, who, like a reed of the Nile,

bends before every tempestuous feeling of his mind. But fear not; I will no longer unite your fate to mine, nor shall you longer suffer on my account.' She would have said more, but the guards forced her to mount a camel, while her companions were obliged to do the same, and escorted by a numerous band, at the head of whom rode the traitor Diapold, they were hurried up the country unable to obtain any reply to their repeated questions. They passed through Sechem and Nazareth, and at length recognised the lofty minarets of Jerusalem fraught with many a bitter recollection. Adelgunda suffered most of all, as she felt convinced that she must now fall a prey to a tyrant who would probably seize by force what had so often been denied to his most fervent prayers.

She looked with streaming eyes towards Eschenbach who rode by her side in dumb despair, and giving him her hand she said: 'If, then, we are doomed to part, carry this assurance with you, that Adelgunda's heart is wholly yours, and can never belong to another.'

Eschenbach was unable to reply, but he pressed her hand fervently to his lips, while he moistened it with those burning tears which man alone can shed.

They had now reached the gates of the city, when another guard, which the zeal of Diapold had in readiness waiting their arrival, surrounded them, and they were carried to the same prison in which the women had formerly languished. The thoughts of a cruel if not even an eternal separation now entered into the minds of all, and they threw themselves into each other's arms to take a last farewell. Their fears, however, in this instance were vain, as they were not thrown into separate dungeons, but all confined together in one large apartment, at the door of which a numerous guard were stationed night and day. They had not remained long in this situation, before the Sultan's life-guards headed by an Emir entered the room, when their chains were immediately knocked off, and the Emir told them that they had nothing to fear, as the Sultan desired to see them immediately, when he could convince them that he had in no wise broken the sacred promise made to them at their departure.

These words, which the old priest interpreted with tears of joy, revived the courage of the little troop, who prepared with joy to obey the summons of the Sultan. Adelgunda alone and Eschenbach were doubtful, and feared that they were yet destined to be the victims of Corradin. They were conducted to the palace by the Emir, and, after passing through several magnificent apartments, were left in a stately saloon till he should have announced their arrival.

At the end of a few minutes he returned and requested the ladies to follow him to another apartment, as the Sultan only wished to see the knights. Perceiving, however, that this request seemed to create some uneasiness, he again assured them that they had nothing to fear, and might, if they pleased, carry the old priest along with them by way of a protector. As soon as the women had withdrawn, Corradin entered followed by several slaves carrying each a covered vessel. He seemed to look with a scowling air as he began in these words: 'Christians, could you ever for one moment have believed that I had forfeited my word, you would not have been the men I have been always willing to believe you, and totally unworthy of my benefits. Behold how I punish those who are guilty of such base treachery!' As he spoke these words he made a sign to the slaves, who, lifting the covers from the vessels which they carried, displayed to the astonished knights a number of heads still reeking.

'Are you satisfied?' he continued; 'if not, say the word, and the wives, the children, of these traitors shall also bleed.'

'Heaven forbid,' cried Frederick, 'that we should desire so dreadful a revenge! If these were yet alive, we would, on the contrary, have implored you to spare their lives.'

'That request,' replied Corradin, 'I should not, however, have granted. They deserved death. I had not sent them forth to disturb the peace, or insult the laws of nations, and give the Christians cause to doubt my word. The port in which they found you is not under my dominion, and therefore had you really, as they imagined, escaped from my power after robbing me of my treasures, they should have demanded the aid of the Cyprians, not basely inveigled you into their

power. To-morrow, you may once more leave a country to which you have been so unjustly brought back, and if all the wealth and possessions of these traitors can be any compensation to you for the loss of time, and the many hardships you have endured, they are yours.'

'No, no!' exclaimed Frederick. 'We ask no compensation. The consciousness of liberty is more than reward sufficient for all our sufferings.'

'My gifts,' continued the Sultan, 'of which these miscreants pillaged you, you will find already restored, and lodged in those apartments I have ordered for your reception, and where I hope you will remain as long as you may find repose necessary. But I well know you must long to fly from a land which has proved replete with every species of horror for you. Go, then, and comfort the women. But may I inquire how fares it with Adelgunda? Greet her from me, and tell her I do not yet choose to encounter her looks, my rebel heart is yet too conscious of its own weakness; but assure her that Corradin, though he can never forget her while the latest pulse shall throb in his bosom, will never again seek to see her or disturb her happiness. Let me see you once more ere you finally depart, as I have yet much to tell you which may clear up what you now consider as mysterious.'

At these words Corradin left them, when they hastened to communicate to the ladies the result of the dreaded interview. Adelgunda herself was now delivered from her fears, and remained without dread under the roof of Corradin; but on the following day, finding themselves sufficiently recovered to recommence their journey, the knights, according to the desire of the Sultan, presented themselves before him. He received them in an apartment decorated with all the magnificence of Eastern splendour, while he himself lay reclined upon a couch of inlaid ebony of exquisite workmanship. Satisfaction seemed to lighten his countenance, and he welcomed their approach with a look of peculiar complacency.

Seating them by his side he said: 'I yesterday promised you the explanation of several things, which, if unexplained before your return to your own country, might have appeared

mysterious, and even incomprehensible to you. Artifice and deceit, when practised even towards an enemy, have ever been hateful and contemptible in my eyes. But in some cases I have been obliged to submit to it, because the son must conform himself to the wishes of his father. You will learn from my narrative at least that the arm of Asia's master can extend itself to the centre of Germany, carrying with it terror and dismay, like the handwriting on the wall. Know, then, that before I had concluded a truce with the Christians after a long series of victories, my father summoned me to Damascus. The mean flatterers who surround a throne and seek to lull its occupant through the medium of voluptuousness and sensuality into a false security, could not, however, prevent the fame of your valour from penetrating through the walls of a seraglio.

'My father had learned that, in the battle of Cesaria, my victory had been dearly purchased, and that I had been opposed by a new body of heroes who might one day shake the throne of the East from its very foundations. Alarmed by these accounts, he was most anxious in his inquiries about this new order, and summoned several German renegadoes, who in my uncle's reign, abjuring their religion and their faith, had been rewarded by places of importance about the Court. In their number appeared the Emir of his guard, who had formerly been the Count of Diápold. He knew everything that concerned the order of the Lion, and increased my father's fears by relating prodigies of their valour, while at the same time he assured him that this order, which was daily gaining strength, would not fail to hasten to Palestine with all their force, and take a signal vengeance for the death of so many of their followers. My father entreated the crafty Emir to think on some means either to reconcile these terrific heroes or else prevent their ever again appearing in Asia.

'The Emir promised he would meditate on this, and at the expiry of three days appeared before my father's throne with the assurance that he would effectually prevent any knight of the Lion ever again wielding a sword in Asia, provided the Sultan would permit himself and all the other Christian renegadoes to revisit Germany and furnish them with every

necessary their plot might require. "Attended by them, I will visit the Castle belonging to the commander of the order, with which I am well acquainted, and should I succeed by artifice or fear, in the application of either of which I must be directed," continued the traitor, "by contingent circumstances, I will extract from him an oath that his order shall never again war against thee. Thou mayest rest assured that none of his knights will ever appear in Syria, or draw their swords against thee."

'My father found the Emir's proposals perfectly adapted for the desired end, but wished at the same time to learn my opinion ere he should finally adopt them. For this purpose he summoned me to Damascus. This was exactly at the period when Adelgunda's flight had left my heart a prey to all the furies of disappointed love. I by no means approved of the plan, which I thought unworthy of a great monarch, particularly when practised towards a private society, but did not at that moment think it proper to express my disapprobation, and only vowed to take an exemplary vengeance on you and your wives; and in the transports of my indignation even detailed with gloomy satisfaction the different modes of torture under which I intended to make you expire.

'Almost immediately after this interview I left my father's Court to head the army which he had sent against the rebels, who threatened him even within the walls of his own palace. While engaged in the operation of this campaign, my father, approving of the Emir's plans, had dispatched him towards Germany with ninety other renegadoes and furnished him with an immense sum of money, from which I conceived that he would never have again returned to this country, and had even entirely forgotten the villain and his schemes, when he yesterday appeared in my presence, and triumphantly announced that he had completely succeeded in deceiving the commander of the Lion, and in extorting from him an oath that no member of his order should ever again be permitted to revisit the Holy Land in arms. I received this intelligence, on which he seemed to pride himself, with the most perfect indifference, and only said that I by no means thought the

supposed advantage would compensate for the monstrous cost of his journey, for you may remember that when I granted you liberty you had made me a similar promise; but the Emir continued with increasing triumph to assure me that I should not regret the expense of the expedition when I learned that he had luckily captured those Christians on whom I had sworn to take vengeance, and whom he had met in Cyprus with all the treasures of which they must have pillaged me.

'My astonishment rendered me dumb, and the rascals, taking my silence for approbation, entered into a circumstantial detail of the manner in which he had entrapped you, till my indignation arose almost to madness. In one moment I beheld that action of my life on which my memory dwelt with the greatest satisfaction cancelled by the hand of a slave, and saw my glory blasted, and Corradin sunk to the level of every perjured and dishonourable wretch.

'I immediately inquired for those who had assisted in this iniquitous transaction, and six of them hastily appeared in hopes of a reward, but I ordered their heads to be severed from their bodies without listening to their screams for mercy. I now feel that I was perhaps too rash in the first transports of my indignation, and that Diapold's intentions ought to have urged in extenuation of his crime, but unfortunately I have been the victim of an overheated imagination but little used to control, and my sole wish at that moment was to clear myself in your eyes and convince you that I was incapable of anything so base. I have, however, already given orders as to the widows, and will endeavour to compensate them in some degree for the loss they have sustained.

I have also conceived it to be a sacred duty to give you the present explanation, and now request that on your return to Germany you may greet your commander in my name, and assure him that I totally release him from the oath extorted from him by the Emir, for I would rather see my dominions overrun by the Christian army, the wives and daughters of my subjects given up a prey to the lust of ravishers, than owe my tranquillity to an action at the recollection of which I should have cause to blush.'

'Generous Corradin,' said Frederick, 'rest assured that, if my voice has any weight, the banner of the Lion shall never again be unfurled upon the plains, and should it ever meet your eye, then will you know at least that all those who have tasted of your heroic generosity are numbered with the dead.'

'Go then in peace, my friends,' said Corradin, 'and, that you may not again be subjected to the mistaken zeal of any of my subjects, take this passport sealed and signed by me. Show it wherever you may pass and you will everywhere command attention and respect within my dominions. But one word more. Have you not fathers and families who wait for you at home?'

'We have,' the knight replied, 'and I fear that at this moment they are a prey to the most dreadful anxiety.'

'Haste then,' exclaimed the Sultan, 'nor lose a moment; for with shame I confess that while fury yet actuated my soul, I granted liberty to several Christian knights merely on condition that they should publish throughout Germany an account of the horrid death I had prepared for you, and that they should in particular acquaint your brethren of the Lion with it. I fear these hasty orders may have been but too scrupulously executed, and that your relations are now weeping over your supposed deaths.'

Frederick groaned: 'Heaven, in thy infinite mercy, have compassion on my poor father!'

The Sultan continued: 'He will, I trust, only feel his happiness the greater when he beholds his heroic sons in life and covered with fresh laurels. One of my Emirs shall conduct you to Acre, where you will find several ships ready to sail for Sicily. I had interdicted the trade of Egypt to their masters, but will now grant it free of all duty, on condition of their furnishing you with their swiftest sailing vessel to convey you to Europe.'

'We can only return you the offering of a grateful heart, but I trust in God that the time may yet arrive when we shall have an opportunity of proving that your generosity has not been bestowed on ingrates,' said Frederick.

'May I venture to inquire how fare your wives?' asked Corradin.

'Rest assured, most generous of men, they fully feel the weight of their obligations, and daily offer up their prayers for your happiness,' said Frederick.

Corradin could not resist asking: 'And does Adelgunda, too, remember me in her prayers? Does she sometimes shed a tear of compassion for the man who so fondly doted on her, and had yet courage to lend her wings to fly from him?'

'Yes, indeed; Adelgunda were unworthy of all affection did she not pray for the generous friend, although she could not reward his love.'

'Tell her,' said Corradin, 'from me, I would not have her mourn, for, though I can never forget her—although time and distance are alike incapable of driving her from the place where she sits enshrined in my heart—yet to know her happy is the only comfort left me.'

At these words Corradin hastily quitted the apartment, anxious to conceal those emotions which the remembrance of Adelgunda always occasioned, and merely waved his hands as a last farewell to the knights.

On being left alone, they proceeded to the apartment of their wives, and informed them of all that had passed between the Sultan and them.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

While preparations were making for their departure on the following day, they proceeded in a body to visit the Holy Sepulchre, and offered up their grateful thanks to the Almighty for their unexpected and happy deliverance. Early the following day they journeyed towards Acre, under the protection of an Emir, who continued with them till he had recommended them to the attention of the owners of the trading vessels, and who, on hearing the Sultan's promise, which insured the acquisition of immense wealth, readily promised to bestow every possible care upon the Christians and land them safely in some port of Tuscany, which would greatly shorten their land journey, and certainly expedite their return to Germany—the weather being in every way so favourable for a sea voyage. True to his engagements, the ship-master safely conveyed the happy party to the blooming shores of Etruria, nor will I attempt to describe the sensations of joy with which the knights and the beloved sharers of their many toils and dangers once more found themselves on Christian land.

Ere they parted from the merchant, they granted him an acknowledgment, signed and sealed, to inform the Sultan that he had safely landed them, and after his departure only remained at the port a sufficient time to procure a few necessary attendants, and purchase horses to convey themselves and their treasures to Germany.

The natural and fervent desire of once more beholding their native land and being pressed in the embrace of those most dear to them urged on the travellers with incredible speed. They could not, without tears, picture to their ima-

gination the moment which should re-unite them to so many beloved objects; while they fervently prayed that it might not be embittered by announcing the loss of any of them. After eleven tedious days they reached the furthest opening of the beloved valley of Issen.

Frederick and Henry, led by a sense of filial affection, had taken this road, as they longed to receive the blessing of a beloved parent before they should obey the calls of duty, and proceed to the Castle of the Lion. As the view of the valley opened before them they recognised, at a great distance, the white walls of Frohburg's new fortress, rising above the oak trees and gilded by the descending sun. The sight would have made them push forward with increased speed, but their horses, which had carried them from the earliest dawn during the whole heat of the day without a moment's rest, were now sinking with lassitude.

Much against their inclinations, and with the tantalising prospect in view, the knights were forced to grant their horses a short respite, as the fortress was still two leagues distant. They therefore dismounted on the declivity of a small hill, from which the road on one side turned off towards Swabia, while on the opposite a winding path led to the peaceful and happy valley. A few lime trees spread their shady branches over the mossy bank, and the travellers sought shelter in their covert, when Eschenbach, who had strolled into the thicket, exclaimed: 'Mysterious providence! Here is a funeral monument adorned with the emblems of our order!'

Attracted by his words, they all hastened to the spot, and, with increasing wonder, beheld a small circular chapel erected in the middle of the lime grove. Opposite the entrance, sculptured in white marble, appeared four wounded lions writhing in the agonies of death. One of them held in his jaws the standard of the Lion, which a vulture in vain attempted to snatch away, while he defended it with his talons against the ravenous bird. It was impossible not to recognise in this the symbol of their unfortunate battle of Cesaria; and with feelings of the deepest emotion, and of that inward joy which can

be only conceived by those who have escaped from similar sufferings, the whole party entered the chapel. On its walls they with wonder beheld the whole of their eventful history in Palestine painted in fresco, in the most beautiful colours.

'Behold! here,' cried Agnes, 'is the battle of Cesaria, as I have often fancied it in my imagination. See, Clara, there is Frederick, nearly concealed by the heaps of the slain; and here, too, by his side, is my own Henry!'—'And there,' interrupted Adelgunda, 'see that warrior pressing to his bosom the banner of his order with one hand, while with the other he clears a passage for the king!' 'Yes,' cried Frederick, 'it was to Eschenbach we were indebted for that glorious deed;—but let us see what this inscription contains.'

He then read as follows: 'In the defiles near Cesaria the wild Saracens surprised the Christian army. The infantry instantly fled on all sides, while the cavalry defended itself nobly, and the heroes of the Lion made the barbarians purchase their victory dearly. Counts Frederick and Henry of Frohburg stood long opposed to thousands, while the knight of Eschenbach, with a few others, saved the banner of the Order; and the King of Jerusalem, to the memory of that glorious though melancholy day, has created this votive tablet.'

Agnes smiled through her tears. 'Well, Sir Knights, you see virtue is sometimes rewarded even in this sublunary world. Many is the tear that has and will be shed over this silent marble, while your names will be re-echoed through the world. Woman as I am, I should think such a reward not too dearly purchased by death itself; but let us read on— who knows but I, too, may be immortalised along with my Henry; who knows but that some village maiden may not have already given a pledge of constancy before my humble effigy, while they offered up an Ave Maria for the peace of my soul—nor am I disappointed. Sure this must be the fortress of Dock, and this must be the noble Weisenborn falling from the battlements at the feet of the astonished Sultan! Well may the remembrance claim our tears, the more that Corradin's generosity towards us probably arose from the admiration of that heroic deed!

'See, Frederick, there is Clara and my poor Bertha in the agonies of death, yet even then thinking more of you than of themselves; and see, though last not least, here am I myself heroically contemplating the wine as it flowed from our last cask. But enough of this melancholy subject, which I cannot yet think of without shuddering. Do you, Frederick, read the inscription.'

Frederick read: 'The ladies Clara, Bertha, Agnes and Adelaide, having followed their lords to the Holy Land, waited their return from battle in the small fortress of Dock, but Count Lewis of Farnsburg and the Knight of Weisenborn were alone destined to escape.

'The Sultan, following up his victories, besieged with his whole army the fortress, which was defended by one hundred and fifty knights, but the barbarians having dried up the fountain of water——'

'Agnes, oh leave this in pity's sake; let us hear no more of these shocking scenes; our time is precious, and we have yet several others to examine. See, what have we here,—two knights riding under the shade of palm-trees, and a lady following them on a camel. Adelgunda, Adelgunda, draw near, this must be you; but let us hear if my conjectures are right.'

Frederick again read: 'The heroine Countess of Zealand, despising a crown, and abandoning unbounded wealth, delivers Counts Frederick and Henry of Frohburg, and accompanies them to Sidon.' In a similar manner was every event of their stay in Syria portrayed which they examined in order, till, with inexpressible delight, they reached that in which the return of Lewis was communicated, and under it appeared the following inscription:

'Count Lewis of Farnsburg returns with his wife, the mourning Bertha, and eight Knights of the Lion. They carried with them the happy tidings that Frohburg's gallant sons would speedily follow them, but it pleased the all-wise Ruler of the Universe to order otherwise. Traveller, proceed and pity the unfortunate.'

The last picture represented the terrible scene which was to have closed their mortal existence and with feelings in

which they all participated, Frederick read the following inscription:

'While hopes of their return filled the hearts of fathers, relatives, and friends at home, the tyrant Corradin thus for ever destroyed these delusive joys. Behold! if tears do not dim thine eyes—Behold, traveller, how dreadfully they were tortured; but the Angel of God hovers over them with the crown of martyrdom, their dying eyes recognise the minister of grace, and they acquire renewed fortitude. Stranger, drop a tear in pity to their disconsolate father, nor depart from hence till thou hast devoutly offered up an orison for the peace of their heroic souls!'

Henry cried, 'Ah, my poor father, how many scalding tears must he have shed on this spot!'

''Tis well,' said Frederick, 'that we have known all this, else sudden joy might have proved too much for his aged and woe-worn frame. I fear we must not present ourselves before him without some previous preparation. Eschenbach, do you precede us, be the bearer of the happy tidings, but in pity break them by degrees to our beloved parent, while we will follow thee slowly.' Eschenbach willingly accepted the office, but ere he should depart they all agreed to offer up an humble thanksgiving on this spot which had been hallowed by a parent's sorrow. They knelt before the altar, and, in a strain of the utmost fervour, breathed forth their thanks to their Almighty and Merciful Maker.

While thus piously employed they heard the sound of approaching footsteps, and turning round, they beheld slowly approaching an aged knight, bent nearly double, and his hands joined upon his breast in the attitude of silent prayer; his long grey locks completely shaded his face, and he was on the point of prostrating himself before the altar, when, observing the strangers, he started back, and uttering a hollow groan, clung to a column for support.

''Tis he! it is himself!' screamed Frederick. 'It is your father,' whispered the others in a voice hardly articulate. But no one ventured to approach or assure the old man that they were his children who knelt before him, lest the intelligence

might have unhinged his reason or proved fatal. He continued for some time to gaze on them with a look of wild misery, while the tears coursed each other down his furrowed cheeks. At length, addressing them in a solemn voice, he said,

'Are my prayers, then, at length heard, and do I behold the blessed spirits of my children? I am thankful, but the sight overcomes me. Speak, then, quickly, ye blessed shades, and say have ye revisited this earth to gladden an aged father's heart, or come ye to seek for justice and repose for your restless ghosts? Say, can I purchase your peace? Do your bones yet lie unburied? Tell me, and I will drag these aged limbs, a willing pilgrim, through Syria's burning sands, to entomb those precious relics.'

'Father, dearest father!' cried Frederick. 'Speak not so. Ah, kill us not indeed with such proofs of tenderness. The Almighty God has been merciful, and you now behold your living children restored to your arms.'

'Yes,' joined in Henry; 'yes, dearest father, the generous Corradin has granted us life and liberty.'

The old man murmured: 'Life, didst thou say—life? Almighty God—ah! who supports me?—I sink. Ah! were you indeed my children, you would not see me fall.'

The fainting old man was now encircled in the arms of his sons, while the weeping Clara and Agnes, clinging to his knees, covered his hands with their hot tears. Looking round with a wild and uncertain air, he said: 'Are these indeed my children? Are these my gallant sons? Is this my Frederick, and this my Henry?'

'Yes, yes; we are your happy sons,' answered they with loving tenderness.

Old Frohburg embraced them. 'Blessed be God that I have found you, though in the place of sorrow; but say, who are these who clasp my trembling knees?'

''Tis Clara and Agnes, your daughters, who long to share your blessing,' said Frederick, smiling on him.

The old eyes looked upwards. 'Oh, grant me, Heaven, to bear as I ought this load of bliss. Come to my heart, ye long-lost treasures. Now am I supremely blessed. What!

not one of all my darlings missing? O God! this happiness is too much to bear. Yet, if it should be still a dream—the phantom of my fevered brain, how dreadful would the hour of waking be after such a dream!'

Frederick reassured him. 'Be composed—fear not, dearest father, it is a vision that will never dissolve, and I trust has yet many happy years in store for you.'

'Is it, then, all reality?' he again asked. 'But say, will you never again forsake your poor old father? Oh God! how dreadful it is to outlive all the objects of one's love—to call in vain for death, to find oneself like a blasted oak without a single child to shelter you from the driving blast.'

'Never, dearest father—oh, never will your children again leave you!'

'Then let me hold you in my arms, my gallant boys, that I may feel you, and know it is not a dream. Now am I happy indeed—ay, quite happy. But is not this the noble Eschenbach, who ventured his own life to release you from prison? Oh, come nearer to me! You are also my son, and must receive a father's thanks. And who was that lovely woman who was leaning on your shoulder, and seems forsaken now?'

Eschenbach answered him: 'It is Adelgunda, the generous Countess of Zealano, to whom we stand all indebted for life and liberty, as her beauty alone had power to soften the heart of Corradin.'

'Approach, lovely lady,' said the aged Count, 'and share an old man's embrace, who would fain call you also daughter. Oh, now I shall be supremely happy! A few hours ago, and I was a miserable solitary thing: now I have many, many children; but you must never leave me more. It would indeed be my death-blow; I could never exist without you after having tasted this happiness. But my thoughts are wandering. Tell me, then, how came you here? Was it some blessed angel that burst open the doors of your prison and bore you across the seas to bless my dying hour?'

'No, dearest father,' said Frederick. 'We were saved, indeed, by the hand of the Almighty, but without the intervention of a miracle. We sailed from Acre, and, everything

seconding our fond wishes, reached this spot a few hours ago; but here our worn-out horses were unable to keep pace with our desire. We were forced to halt, and chance having conducted us to this monument of a father's affection, you found us on our knees, pouring out the tribute of grateful hearts.'

'Come, then, my children,' replied Frohburg, 'and resume your pious work; nor will your prayers be less acceptable at the throne of the Almighty if accompanied by a grateful father's voice.' Saying this, the old man knelt at the foot of the altar, surrounded by his united family.

It was a picture worthy of Raphael's pencil, and which no heart could have witnessed unmoved. A look, to which the gratitude and resigned confidence of a Christian lent a more than human expression, shone on the countenance of the white-haired veteran. He looked with a gentle smile upon his children, and raised his hands to heaven in grateful thanks to his Creator. When his prayer was ended, supported by his sons, he moved towards the door of the chapel. As he passed the last picture, he said, 'This shall be effaced, and in its place shall be represented our unexpected and happy meeting on this spot.' On passing the threshold of the chapel, Frohburg, looking around with delight, cried: 'How beautiful, how glorious are the works of our Almighty Maker! Now, for the first time since I lost you, do I feel sensible to the charms of nature—everything seems now to smile in unison with my feelings. But an hour ago, and all nature seemed wrapped in a veil of mourning. What will all the old servants of the Castle say when they see me return in such company? I think I heard the shouts of my grateful vassals hailing this gleam of sunshine for their old master. Pardon me, my children; I know I am like a child to talk thus, but every object connected with this moment is dear to me, and my dear old friend too, the sharer of all my sorrows—thy father, Agnes, how will he rejoice?'

'God be praised!' she said, 'that I hear you name my father. I trembled to inquire after him. You say that he lives, and I am happy—and my mother? You hesitate to answer—ah, my poor mother!'

'Those who sleep,' he said, 'in the silent grave after a life of righteousness are not always the most to be pitied. Often have your father and I envied her happy lot in being released from this valley of tears.'

Agnes understood but too well from these words that she had lost her mother, and threw herself into Henry's arms, who with tender sympathy shared the first emotions of her sorrow. Unwilling to disturb the general joy, Agnes continued to smother her tears, comforting herself in the thoughts that her father was yet spared to her.

On reaching the spot where the old Count had left his horses, at a considerable distance from the chapel, the attendants turned pale at the sight of what they conceived to be departed spirits, and attempted to secure their safety by flight. But when they heard their master's voice calling to them in joyful accents to return, they were at length convinced that his children lived, and pressed forward to kiss their outstretched hands, which they bedewed with their tears.

Old Frohburg was almost struck dumb with surprise when he beheld the numerous mules and horses loaded with the gifts of the generous Corradin, whom he had been always taught to curse. Their progress along the valley resembled the triumph of a returning conqueror. Everything that lived and breathed rushed out to greet and bless their generous benefactors thus miraculously restored to them. The old Count would often call to the multitude to approach, and when surrounded by them, he in the joy and pride of his heart would embrace his sons, exclaiming, 'See! I am as happy as you are, I have also my children.'

Ere the travellers reached the Castle thousands had joined the train, to whom the Count cried, 'For this day you are all my guests; ye must share me my joy and drink to the return of my children—you and yours shall never forget the happy day which restored them to my arms.'

On the arrival of the happy party, shouts of tumultuous joy echoed through the Castle, and Clara and Agnes, with happy smiles, presented the cup of welcome to the old Count and the Knights, while the old seneschal, unable almost to

speak through his tears of joy, came to announce that a Knight of the Lion had just arrived, and wished to communicate news of the utmost importance to his lord.

The Knight was ushered into the hall and announced that old Farnsburg requested his immediate attendance at the Castle of the Lion, where the long-expected noble guest had at length arrived, bearing the happy tidings that his sons were yet in life and would soon be with them. 'Thank God,' continued the Knight, 'these happy tidings I see are already accomplished. Welcome, welcome, my noble brothers, to your native land.'

The Knights and Agnes crowded round the stranger to inquire after those so dear to them at the Castle of the Lion, while Frohburg, drawing Frederick aside, informed him that Farnsburg's noble guest was no other than the young King of Sicily, who was come to offer himself as a candidate for the Order of the Lion, and was anxious in the meantime to remain unknown, after which he meant to avow himself openly and endeavour to vindicate his claims to the imperial throne which were now opposed by Otto the Saxon, after the murder of Philip.

Frederick felt greatly rejoiced at this account, and determined to urge Farnsburg to assist the young King with all the power of the Lion.

As the whole party determined on setting off for Farnsburg on the following day, the stranger Knight was forced to remain, although he was anxious to have been the first bearer of such joyful intelligence, and having made the necessary arrangements, the rest of the evening was dedicated to happiness and the recollection of the scenes of their youth which every surrounding object so forcibly recalled to their recollection.

Adelgunda fully shared in the feelings of her friends, in whose circle she found every wish accomplished. Eschenbach, no longer her guardian, was still her inseparable companion, her avowed lover, the man of her choice, and soon to be blessed with a yet tenderer name. Clara had anxiously inquired after the last remaining child of five which she had

had by Hagberg, and whom, at her departure for Asia, she had committed to the care of an old friend; alas! she found that this lovely flower had also been cut off, and she was doomed to mourn over the last of her babes; but Frederick softened the blow, or at least prevented her from indulging in the painful recollection, by reminding her that she carried in her bosom a pledge of their affection and their future hope, and she, yielding to the powerful argument and her affection for the father, exerted herself to conceal if not to surmount her affliction.

The happy family party sat up till a late hour, and even when the wearied travellers at length retired to their apartments it was in vain they sought for sleep, the joyous shouts of the assembled vassals echoed round the walls the livelong night, and at the dawn of day the whole party prepared for their departure without having been once able to close their eyes.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MEANWHILE, Farnsburg had dispatched couriers in every direction to call in every member of the Lion, who was not actually engaged in the service of the Order, and our travellers in the course of their journey were joined by many of these, who hailed them with transport as risen from the dead, while some, without communicating their intentions, pushed on towards the Castle of the Lion, to be the first bearers of the glad tidings of their appreach.

The young King Frederick, who had lately arrived there, was only known as such by the very few who had seen him in his own dominions, while to the others he was presented as a noble Sicilian come to transact some secret business of the Order.

This prince had been obliged to travel to Germany by circuitous and unfrequented roads, as Otto, who had already been crowned emperor at Rome, in order to prevent the approach of his dreaded rival had made himself master of the greater part of Apulia, and also stationed detachments of troops on every avenue leading to Germany. Frederick, however, by an assumed disguise, escaped his numerous snares, and reached in safety the Castle of the Lion, where his hopes were much roused by the promise of assistance held out to him by its noble commander.

At this moment Fortune, tired of persecuting him, seemed inclined to atone for his former sufferings. Pope Innocent, who at this time wore the triple crown, and who, after the death of Henry, had so strenuously opposed the claims of Frederick, urged by some secret disgust, had hurled against Otto the papal thunder, and the different princes of the empire,

already disgusted with their new master, seemed but little inclined to oppose the dreadful anathema. Headed by Siegfried, Archbishop of Mayence, they had sent secret emissaries to invite Frederick, and promising to join his standard as soon as it should be displayed in Germany. The young King, whose ruling passion was ambition, hesitated not to obey the summons, but fearing the attempts of Otto upon his paternal dominions during his absence, he left the whole of his standing army in Sicily, and accompanied by only a few chosen friends embarked in a felucca for the port of Genoa. At this port it was that he learned from some Templars who had that moment arrived from Sidon, that Frederick and his friends had not only been spared but loaded with immense treasures by the Sultan, and that they were probably at that moment landed in some port of Italy.

One day the King was engaged as usual in talking on this favourite topic with old Farnsburg and Lewis, when among the Knights of the Order who were hourly arriving, four, covered with dust, breathless and panting, rushed into the hall and shouted out that ere an hour should elapse, Count Frohburg with his two sons, their wives, and several others of their brothers, whom they had long regarded as dead, would be at the gates. 'Almighty God!' cried the old man, 'forgive me if in the hour of sorrow I have ever arraigned Thy justice or doubted Thy mercy. Thou art now about to bestow the greatest of all earthly blessings on Thy servant ere Thou callest him away. Thanks, thanks, oh, my God; but I must hasten to meet them. My time is short, and I would not willingly lose one moment of my happiness. I shall see my Agnes, I shall behold my noble heroes. Messengers of bliss! you make my heart glad indeed. Hasten to call everyone; let us all hasten to meet them.'

The good old man in the excess of his joy threw away his staff, and strengthened by his inward happiness hastened forward. Lewis ran to his assistance, and the King, who had never forgotten what he owed to Frederick, followed on the steps of the old Count, impatient once more to behold his friend.

The happy news was communicated with the rapidity of lightning through the fortress. It soon reached the ears of Adelaide, who, clasping her newborn babe to her breast, flew down to meet her brothers. Bertha alone, still mourning and afflicted, remained in her apartment. 'I could not contain myself,' she said, 'were I to witness this scene of bliss, while my every hope of happiness is buried in my Weisenborn's grave. Alas, he will never return to gladden the soul of his poor Bertha; the cold grave will not yield up its inhabitant, and there alone must she seek for happiness and him.'

The strength of Farnsburg was soon exhausted, and he was forced to pause before he had crossed the first court; but his faithful attendants, guessing the wishes of their master by his expressive and imploring countenance, placed him on their shoulders and bore him to the shade of some sheltered oaks on the edge of the rock, where he had formerly spent so many hours, watching in almost hopeless anxiety for the return of his children. From this spot he could overlook the plain to an immense distance. The day was clear and bright, a soft breeze played through the white locks and coloured the wan cheek of the worthy old man, while he anxiously bent his eyes towards the road which led from Switzerland, but old age had dimmed his sight, and he in vain sought to distinguish objects in the distance.

Every moment he would turn to some of those who surrounded him and inquire if they could distinguish anything.

On all sides knights were seen to approach, and hasten up the hill, while their nodding plumes waved among the branches; but they were not those so anxiously expected, although they assured the impatient Farnsburg that Frohburg and his little band must soon appear.

'See, are not these they?' cried Adelaide pointing with her hand. 'It is! it is!' cried everyone. 'I recognise Frederick,' shouted one. 'I can discover the fluttering of the women's veils,' said another, while the old commander bitterly lamented his want of sight, and piteously exclaimed, 'Where, oh where? would that I could see them too!'

At length the tender father's wish was accomplished. He

could distinguish them. He saw them galloping through the trees. He tottered forward a few steps, and received Agnes in his arms. While he grasped her convulsively to his breast he in vain attempted to speak, but his streaming eyes thanked the Being who had restored his daughter to his home. At length he stammered out, 'Thou art the child of my love. To thee belongs the first kiss, the first welcome; but now I must also clasp my sons, for they are all dear to me.' Frederick and Henry then shared the old man's embrace, but he saw Adelaide's impatience to be with her brothers, and he relinquished them to her while he by turns welcomed and embraced all the other knights.

'Every son of the Lion,' he cried, 'is dear to me, but you are now all doubly so after having so often wept your loss.'

The young King had remained at a little distance to enjoy undisturbed the feelings excited by this scene of happy reunion, but when he saw the groups moving towards the castle he also claimed the rights of friendship, and, rushing into Frederick's arms, he said, 'I have till now remained in this castle unknown, but thou art returned, my friend, my saviour, and I have nothing further to fear. Everyone shall know that to thee I owe my crown, and that without thy valour I should never have enjoyed the privileges of my birth.'

Many who were yet unacquainted with the rank of the noble stranger stood amazed at this speech, while old Farnsburg, approaching with a smile, said, 'Your gratitude, my liege, has proved a traitor to your secret; but behold the countenances of all my knights, and you will easily see that they are not unworthy of your confidence, but are ready to defend your just cause.'

'Thanks, my noble leader, for this generous assurance, which is only what I expected from you, though my duty prevailed in promising it to the King, when we last met. Then long live the lawful Emperor of the Germans!'—and, taking up the words of Frederick, all the knights shouted, 'Long may he live! May the shield of the Lion be stretched over him, and its avenging sword long protect his rights!'

The King gratefully answered: 'My noble and generous

friends,—although a monarch, I can only give you a beggar's thanks, but the time, I hope, may ere long arrive when I shall be able to prove the extent of my gratitude.'

On their arrival at the Castle, old Farnsburg ordered his knights to lay aside the garb of war, that they might more fully enjoy themselves during the two following days, which were to be devoted exclusively to festivity and mirth. Immense as was the Castle of the Lion, numerous as were its apartments, it could not accommodate the whole of its present guests, many of whom were obliged to banquet under the canopy of heaven, and at night to lodge in the huts of some of the vassals in the vicinity of the fortress; but this by no means disturbed the general joy which everyone sought to increase.

The goblet was rapidly circulated; everyone was busied in greeting old acquaintances. The two old fathers were seated in social conversation by each other, when Eschenbach, leading Adelgunda, approached a corner of the hall where the young King had retired to contemplate the pleasing and animated scene which was passing around.

'My noble liege,' said the Knight, 'amid the gracious marks of your attention towards all those who have escaped from Palestine, this noble lady have you alone neglected. Behold her tears. She fears that anger may yet dwell in your breast, and that you are resolved to punish the crimes of the father upon his trembling daughter.'

'Gracious heaven!' exclaimed the King. 'Is not this Count Zealano's daughter?'

'Yes,' said Eschenbach, ''tis she; when your just sentence had banished the Count—her father—her filial piety made her resolve to share his punishment and soften his exile; but, sensible of the duty of a subject, the Countess would never have dared to obtrude herself upon your presence had she known that you were an inhabitant of this castle.'

The King kissed Adelgunda's forehead. 'Loveliest of women!—thou art welcome! Thou hast been guilty of no fault, and I have nothing to forgive. Thy unexampled filial tenderness deprived my kingdom of a treasure with which I

would never willingly have parted; but the virtue and disinterestedness which induced thee to despise the splendour of a throne, and rather to languish in a dungeon than bestow thy hand on the future ruler of Asia, has increased my admiration almost to idolatry.'

'My Lord and King, your goodness makes me blush; and those thanks which my faltering tongue cannot utter lie deep engraven in my heart,' said Adelgunda, with emotion; and the King continued: 'Only grant me a small corner in that heart, and I will be more proud than if I sat on the throne of conquered kingdoms. I am now happy to have it in my power to tell thee that thy father is once more restored to his country, and, although he has obtained my entire forgiveness, has preferred retiring to the quiet of a cloister, where he wishes to forget the world, and atone for his transgressions.'

'Generous monarch,' she said, 'receive the humble thanks of a daughter who may now hope with confidence to meet her father again, in the realms of bliss, if not in this world.'

The King seemed surprised. 'How so? Wilt thou never return to Sicily? Shall I never enjoy the happiness of publicly proving to all thy friends—to all thy foes, if such excellence can have any enemy,—how highly I honour and value thee?'

'I have, alas! no country, and have promised never to part from these my friends, the companions of my sufferings. I have sworn it, nor can I now, should I ever desire it, retract without being guilty of perjury,' said Adelgunda.

The King, taking her hand and pointing to Eschenbach, said: 'And do you reckon this noble warrior among the number of those friends?'

'I do,' said Adelgunda, blushing.

The King rejoined: 'See what joy your answer and your glowing blushes have spread over his countenance. But he is right. I should also, like him, rejoice, were I so happy as to be in his place.'

'Why should I blush? I glory in confessing before my sovereign that the Knight of Eschenbach has my love, and

will soon possess a lawful claim to it,' she said, with animation.

'Sir Knight,' said the King, 'thy lot is indeed an enviable one—perhaps far more so than his who now speaks to thee, but, though thou robbest my kingdom of its brightest gem, I do not repine. If happiness in this world be the lot of anyone, thou surely may'st expect it; for she who could love a father with an affection so pure, so godlike, how must she feel when every sentiment and thought is bound to one dear object only. But say, have you hereditary possessions in this country?'

'Yes,' said Eschenbach; 'I hold, not far from this, a small castle and its dependences.'

The King continued: 'If God blesses my enterprise and permits me to mount the throne of Germany, I will take care to increase thy property; but Adelgunda is an orphan, and my duty devolves on me the power of a father. She is an only daughter—a sole heiress—and from this hour do I put her in possession of the forfeited estates of Count Zealano. Thy happy husband, Adelgunda, shall not only rob my Sicilians of the fairest, but also of the richest maid; and perhaps thou may'st one day think it worth thy while to visit Sicily and see what wealth thy father left when he chose a monastic life.'

'Oh,' she said, 'my generous, my noble master, where shall I find words to thank thee?'

'A kiss is all I claim for my reward'—and he embraced her—'now thou hast made me thy debtor. Eschenbach, thou must not be jealous if I have stolen that which thou so often willingly obtainest.'

'My liege, I have no title to be angry that a father should kiss his child!'

'Thou recallest a duty which I have yet to perform'—and the monarch placed Adelgunda's hand in Eschenbach's. 'Be as happy as ye deserve; and may your love last as long as my friendship—then must it be eternal.' He led them to the old Count. 'See, I am become a father, and have just betrothed the dearest of my children to this knight. I have

restored to the Countess Adelgunda of Zealano the forfeited estates of her father. They shall be her dowry, and I wish you to witness the donation, until I shall have leisure to execute it in writing.'

The words, having been pronounced aloud, awakened the attention of all present, who accordingly approached to offer their congratulations, while Frederick Frohburg and the old priest claimed an equal right to be regarded as the adopted father of Adelgunda, and refused to resign their pretensions, even in favour of royalty itself.

The King, smiling, turned to Adelgunda, and requested her to decide on their respective claims. 'You, my liege,' replied the smiling maid, 'are at once my King and father. You,' she said, turning to the priest, 'shall bless our union, on the day when Eschenbach and I shall appear before you at the altar; and you, Count Frohburg, with your noble sons, shall witness my vows and my happiness. Are you all satisfied?'

'They have all reason to be pleased, except myself, miserable old man, whom you, lovely Countess, seem totally to have forgotten, though perhaps not the least anxious for your happiness,' said Farnsburg.

Then spoke Adelgunda: 'Think not, noble sir, that you were forgotten. From you I have a boon of no small import to request—that you should on my marriage day adorn my husband with every honourable badge of your order.'

Farnsburg asked: 'Eschenbach, do you expect to merit them all in so short a time?'

'Pardon a woman,' said Adelgunda, 'speaking on deeds of arms, but has he not already more than earned them by hazarding his life, and forfeiting his liberty, for the safety of his brothers?'

'Methinks in having such an advocate the noble Eschenbach requires no other reward; but, lovely pleader, you are right: extraordinary actions require more than common honours, and perhaps you may yet bribe me to fulfil your wish,' said Farnsburg.

The conversation soon took another turn, and Farnsburg

anxious to learn everything that had occurred in Palestine after the departure of his son, requested Frederick to be the narrator, while everyone crowded round with eager attention.

When Farnsburg heard who had been the impostor who, under the character of a supernatural being, had so cruelly tortured his feelings, he rejoiced that this clear explanation of the mystery should at last be made known, as in spite of the powers of his own reason and the appearances of deceit which had been discovered, yet, in the hours of solitude and sorrow, the strange event had often obtruded itself upon his mind accompanied by unaccountable and painful feelings. He regretted that the Sultan's hasty passion had deprived him of the possibility of ever learning how Count Diapold and his companions had succeeded in penetrating within the recesses of a fortress so strictly guarded on all sides.

Some of the older members of the order, however, accounted for this in a certain degree by reminding Farnsburg that this same Diapold when a very young man had sought admission into the order, but having failed in the very first trial was rejected, at which his father had been so incensed that he drove him from his Castle, and publicly disowned him as his son. After this public disgrace Diapold, unable to continue in Europe, had enlisted under the banners of the Bishop of Bamberg, and proceeded to Palestine, where he betrayed his cause and renounced his religion. Nor was it at all improbable that a desire of being revenged on the order of the Lion, which had been the primary cause of his disgrace, had actuated him to undertake this romantic expedition in which his former knowledge of the Castle had enabled him so perfectly to succeed.

When Frederick had finished his narrative, in the course of which he dwelt with particular energy on the disinterested generosity of Corradin, whom religious zeal induced the Crusaders in general to describe as a barbarous tyrant, they all retired to the banquet, where the Sultan's health was drunk with the greatest enthusiasm, while it was unanimously resolved that during his reign no member of their order should ever appear in arms within his dominions.

It was not till the following day that Bertha ventured to take her seat at the table, and even then, although she smiled to prove to her friends that she rejoiced in their happiness, an unbidden tear would oft obtrude itself, and steal down her wan cheek.

The third day after the arrival of the knights, their commander summoned them to the Lion's hall, now no longer capable of containing all its members since their late amazing increase. They were obliged to come in in different divisions while Farnsburg proposed to them King Frederick of Sicily as a candidate, determining at the same time that his trials should commence after four days...

As Lewis and the others who returned with him from Palestine had been raised to the dignity of knights of the fourth order, he now proposed showing the same respect to those who accompanied Frederick, but that Eschenbach, to whose persevering courage they were probably indebted for the safety of all their friends, should be admitted to the number of the anointed and nominated leader—proposals which met with the unanimous approbation of all the knights.

Although the four days following were apparently solely devoted to festivity and rejoicing, old Farnsburg with the knights of the fourth order would often retire to consult on the probation which the young King should undergo, as the virtues required from a crowned head are far different from those called for from a simple knight of whatever rank. While their plans were in agitation, the impatient young monarch began to feel some suspicions of the sincerity of his new friends, suspicions which were in no wise diminished by the altered looks of many of the inhabitants of the Castle, who, instead of that open familiarity only tempered by becoming respect by which they were wont to treat him, now in general met him with looks of cold indifference, while at the same time he frequently observed them whispering in corners and eyeing him at the same time with the most expressive regards.

He now began to fear that he had been too precipitate in trusting himself almost unattended in their power, in a land

where Otto had so many partisans, and where the delivery of his person would obtain any reward short of the crown itself. One morning that the mysterious conduct of the knights had struck him more forcibly than usual, he retired beyond the walls of the Castle to ponder on these things at leisure, when he was accosted by a trooper, who, after some hesitation, inquired if he was a knight of the Lion.

Frederick, who could not divest himself of the idea that his fate was in some way concerned in the question, hesitated not to reply in the affirmative. 'Then,' said the trooper, speaking in a low voice and looking round to see if no one overheard him, 'you may probably be able to inform me if the King of Sicily is still within your Castle,' and on the King replying that he was: 'Thank God!' cried the trooper; 'I will hasten to my master with the happy tidings.' Frederick's doubts were now fully confirmed, but he saw the necessity for dissimulation more than ever, and, continuing his assumed character, he pretended to be intimately acquainted with all that was passing, and easily brought the trooper to confess that he was the bearer of a letter from the Emperor Otto to the Commander of the Lion.

Frederick saw that it would be of the utmost consequence to him to make himself master of this letter, and was thinking of the most likely means to get it into his possession, when the trooper saved him all that trouble by drawing it from the sheath of his sword, and requesting Frederick to deliver it secretly to his master, as he feared to be observed by some of the King's attendants should he enter the fortress.

It was with the utmost difficulty that Frederick could conceal his joy at the proposal, but the unsuspecting messenger, enjoining him to deliver it immediately and apparently rejoicing to be freed of his dangerous commission, without waiting for his answer, hastened down the hill.

The moment the trooper had disappeared, Frederick, concealing the writing carefully in his bosom, retired among the thickest of the trees. But even now he hesitated whether or not he ought to break the seals; yet the urgency of the case

on which, probably, his life and liberty depended, the treachery of those in whom he had placed the most unlimited confidence, urged him on; and while his agitation made his hands tremble he drew forth the letter, which had been carefully folded, and, tearing open the seals, read as follows:

'Trusty and well beloved,—Your faithful ally, the Archbishop of Mayence, has just informed us that he has succeeded by artful promises, in drawing the young King Frederick to Germany, and that he has fallen into your snares.

'Our spies had already informed us of his departure from Sicily, and that he might the more easily fall into the trap that had been dug for him, and that he might not suspect that he was taking the very step we wished, but durst scarcely expect, we purposely threw several obstacles on his route to Germany, and obliged him to take a circuitous road through the Tyrol and Chur. It was not our interest to have made ourselves master of his person in Italy, where he had still so many adherents; we therefore permitted him to escape, often laughing at the foolish boy who was pursuing imaginary greatness, and at the same time abandoning the reality of his Italian possession, which had, of consequence, fallen into our hands. Watch him closely; his escape might prove fatal to us and you. Remember that a secret and eternal imprisonment must be his doom unless he publicly signs a formal renunciation to all his claims on the crown of Germany.

'Tell him this, and you may add that, if he agrees to this proposal, we here pledge our imperial word that, in the course of a twelvemonth, he shall be restored to liberty, and that our bounty will allow him a considerable pension towards his maintenance. But should he prove obstinate and you think he is not likely to bind—as you value our favour take care to remove him—a bold dagger or a subtle poison—you understand us—he will then sink into the realms of oblivion, from whence no one ever returned to require vengeance, and you may peaceably enjoy the immense rewards which you shall have earned. Your son shall be Duke of Swabia, nor will we grant any donation of lands, or lucrative and honourable employment, till all your knights are fully provided for. If

you feel as you ought the greatness of our offers you will act accordingly.

'OTTO, *Imperator*.'

Thunderstruck at this fatal paper, the unfortunate young King beheld himself beset on all sides and cruelly abandoned by those in whom he had placed such unlimited confidence; and, as the only possible means of saving himself, determined immediately to fly from the Castle, though he could scarcely flatter himself with the hopes of escaping through a country filled with the troops of his enemy. He had no sooner formed this resolution than he wished to execute it before the suspicions of the inhabitants of the Castle should be roused, and was hastening to the outer gates, two of which still lay between him and the last fosse, when he was startled by the sound of steps approaching through the trees. His hand mechanically sought his sword—he had none—and, finding himself unable to make any resistance, he resolved to retire behind the trunk of an immense oak, which was so overgrown with mistletoe as to afford a complete shade. He had scarce taken his station when he perceived a party of the knights of the Lion approaching in complete armour, and seeming carefully to search for some one or other. He endeavoured to conceal himself still more closely, and as they passed near him heard one of them say distinctly, 'I can see him nowhere.'

Another answered: 'I am certain I saw him a few minutes ago turn in this direction, and he could not have passed the outer works without being seen by the sentinels. He probably retired this way to read the intercepted letter. How could the messenger be so simple as to deliver it into his hands! And yet, from the description he gave of his person and his rich dress, we cannot hope that he was mistaken—it must have been the King himself.'

'However, if he had fled,' continued a third, 'there would have been an end of all our rich expectations from Otto. We may be thankful for the accident that threw the messenger into our hands, and made us acquainted with the mistake before it was too late.'

During this conversation the traitors had several times passed the oak tree without discovering the King. When they at length left the grove, Frederick deeply lamented that he had not immediately fled on receiving the letter without seeking for a more decided proof of their treachery, as he now saw no possibility of escaping during the daylight, when so many were actually in pursuit of him.

His only hopes rested on the possibility of remaining undiscovered till night, when, aided by its friendly obscurity, he might, perhaps, find means of eluding the vigilance of his spies. In these hopes, however, he was cruelly disappointed. Before sunset the whole grove was surrounded by armed men, and the unfortunate Frederick discovered in his lurking place.

'My liege,' said the leader of the party with feigned respect, 'why have you been so long absent? And why do we at last find you skulking like a criminal?'

The King answered proudly: 'A bad action is a stranger to this breast, but when murderers rule a land, when pretended friends are converted into real traitors, and betray the sacred rights of hospitality, then it behoves the upright to seek from rocks and woods that shelter which his fellow-creature denies him.'

The leader answered: 'I do not understand your language, my liege, but have only to say that I come by the orders of our commander to learn why you have thus trifled with his friendship, and why you have deceitfully made yourself master of a letter addressed to him.'

'Has he whom you call your master,' said the King, 'dared to send this message? Then tell him that his cold and mysterious conduct had for some time past excited my suspicions as to the sincerity of his pretended friendship; that the duty of self-preservation urged me to an act which in every other situation I would have scorned, and that I have now in my hands the undoubted proof of his perfidy.'

The leader replied: 'I will deliver your message, but doubt whether such threatening language is very prudent in your present circumstances. I have yet to demand that you

deliver up the writing which you have so unjustly seized, and even, perhaps, ventured to read.'

'Then take it,' said the King, 'and blush with your chief for this villainous act.'

'Then you have actually broken open the seals,' exclaimed the leader. 'I pity you—your fate is now irrevocably decided; nor can I conceal from you that in this case I am commanded to bear you immediately to prison.'

The King with proud dignity made answer: 'I follow thee; nor can I feel angry at thee, who art but the blind minister of another's treachery. But thy commander—miserable old man, who totters on the verge of eternity—bid him remember that this foul deed will draw on him and his order the curses of posterity and that the blood of the anointed will call down vengeance from heaven.'

Frederick, surrounded by the knights who held their naked swords, was conducted through several courts of the Castle to a small dungeon in which he was enclosed by numerous doors securely bolted. A small lamp suspended from the ceiling shed a fitful and uncertain light on the stone pavement, while there appeared no window or aperture through which the light of day could penetrate.

'If this is to be my eternal habitation,' exclaimed the King, as he paced the narrow cell, 'if I must live here unknown, unpitied, and forgotten—there needs no dagger, no poisoned bowl; despair will speedily do the work!'

In this manner nearly an hour elapsed, during which the King felt, with all the impetuosity and keen sensibility of youth, the horrors of his situation. At length he heard the iron bolts withdrawn, and six armed knights with their vizors closed entered the dungeon. One of them held a roll of parchment, and another the implements for writing, while the four others, with their swords drawn, guarded the door.

One of them said: 'Prisoner! I bring thee greeting of our commander.'

'Ah, slave, why is not thy stubborn knee bent? Although a prisoner, I am yet a king and demand respect. Death alone

can rob me of my dignity, or exempt thee from thy duty,' said the proud youth.

The knight answered: 'I come not to argue with thee on subjects foreign to my purpose, but I bring thee a message which I command thee to listen to.'

The King started. 'Command! Almighty God, does Thy thunder sleep? But proceed.'

'Hast thou read and conned over that letter which thou basely dared to open?' asked the knight.

'Slave that thou art,' again exclaimed King Frederick, 'I tell thee I demand respect; nor will I answer while thou continuest to address me in this manner. Alter thy language and raise thy vizor, for neither is allowed in addressing majesty.'

The knight calmly replied: 'That your obstinacy may not yet more excite the anger of the Lion, I will yield' (lifting his vizor). 'Are you now satisfied?'

The King rejoined: 'I am, and will now answer thee. I have read with attention the treacherous letter, and am fully convinced of Otto's black designs, and still more of the treachery of thine order.'

'Are you then ready,' asked the knight, 'to subscribe to the only conditions on which you can ever expect to regain your liberty? Will you sign this renunciation in our presence?'

'Never!' said the King; 'ask this as long as thou hast life, let thy children demand it when thou art no more, my answer shall ever be the same—No, never!'

The knight continued: 'Be advised! Take the counsel of a man who feels compassion for your youth. You must be sensible that, if you continue obstinate, we cannot long permit you to live; our own safety requires that your fate be speedily decided.'

'I will act as becomes a king,' said the youth.

'Once more, then, do you say that you will not sign this parchment?'

'Give it to me,' said the King. The knight hastily handed it to him, while the others presented a pen. Frederick eyed

them with a look of the utmost contempt, tore the parchment, and threw it upon the ground, saying not a word more than these: 'Send your executioners, and leave me to myself!' The knights again attempted to speak, but the King enjoined silence; and, awed by his dignified manner, they shrank from the dungeon. Frederick was, however, left but a short time to his own reflections. The sound of approaching footsteps again echoed along the long galleries, and the six knights returned, accompanied by another, who, over his armour, wore a scarf of black crape. In his hand he held a covered tankard, and took his station beside the King, while the knight who had formerly spoken said: 'The clemency and patience of our commander are at length exhausted. We bring you death in this cup, and have orders not to leave you till we have seen you drain it to the dregs.'

'Ah, this is speedy indeed,' said the poor youth. 'He that has sent thee on this horrid duty was once my friend. He swore to defend my rights, and now he sends me this dreadful cup.'

'Yet is the door of mercy open. If you will sign this deed you may yet live.'

The brave youth answered: 'Thy commander is truly generous, and posterity must record his mercy, for he leaves to the innocent the choice of death or infamy. But it is well. Say, may I not speak to Count Frederick of Frohburg?'

The knight replied: 'I am transgressing the orders I received in holding any conversation with you, but I will tell you that you cannot. He you inquire for, with his brother Henry and the knight of Eschenbach, having ventured to oppose themselves to the just sentence of our commander, have, like you, been immured in a dungeon.'

'Oh, for my sake!' said the King. 'All this strikes deep indeed. But at least, then, I have one friend left, and rejoice to know that there were found three honest and faithful hearts among so many traitors. I could wish to die in their arms if it might be permitted. Say, what has become of Count Lewis, your commander's son?'

The knight replied: 'We have already greeted him as

Duke of Swabia, and he is fully sensible of his happiness. But now no more questions—time is precious. Drink this cup, or prepare to sign.'

'Suppose I should choose to do neither?' said the King.

'Then this dagger must decide the contest.'

'So, then, you are the executioner of the order—a most enviable office. How long may one live after swallowing this poison?' asked the King.

'One hour at most,' was the answer.

'A short time; but it shall be employed as becomes a Christian. Does any priest dwell among such murderers?' asked Frederick.

'Yes; and as we do not wish to destroy your soul, he shall attend you as soon as you have emptied the bowl,' said his executioner.

'So be it, then,' said the King. 'I am a king, and as such I will die. On you and your commander's responsibility do I empty this cup.' He drained it. 'See, not a drop is left; and now leave me. Send the priest, that I may confess my sins, and I trust that, while I resign this earthly crown, I may obtain one of martyrdom.'

'Farewell, then—a long farewell,' said the knight. 'To our commander will I relate all that has passed, and though many have expired before you in this dungeon, I have never yet seen one so great or so heroic as you.'

'Ah, this is indeed a triumph that I can feel on the brink of eternity—my executioner is become my panegyrist. Should you after death recognise in my inanimate features any signs of dread, believe not that they were the shrinkings of the soul, but the involuntary struggles of weak humanity.'

As he spoke, the knights retired, and closed the door as gently as possible. The King listened for some time, but, hearing no footsteps, he feared, with reason, that his last petition had been denied; and, falling on his knees, he addressed himself at once to the Father of Mercies.

He had not prayed long, when the floor on which he knelt began to move. He attempted to spring up, but, ere he could rise, the floor sank, and he was precipitated into impenetrable

darkness. For a time his senses forsook him, but when recollection returned, and when he sought to open his eyes, they were dazzled by the glare of brilliant torches, and he was forced to shut them again; while at the same moment he felt himself closely pressed in the arms of two men. Again he ventured to look up, and found that he was lying in the extended arms of Frederick and Eschenbach, while all the other knights surrounded him, and in a solemn voice shouted: 'Hail! hail! hail! hail to the victor!' And again the knights repeated, 'All hail to him!'

And again a voice spoke: 'Hail! hail! hail! hail to the King! who, rather than resign his rights, preferred an honourable death. He is worthy to sit on the tottering throne of Germany, and by his courage restore its faded glory.'

Then burst out the chorus: 'All hail to him! May he long live! May he long reign!'

And the single voice continued: 'He is worthy of entering this noble order, and well does he deserve the support of the mighty Lion.'

'He is! he is!' cried the knights. 'Every member longs to be marshalled to the field in his favour!'

The powerful voice that had before spoken said: 'We have proved him; give him also time to prove us, and to decide whether he still wishes to be a member of the Lion, and undergo the future trials by which he must gradually ascend to the height which becomes his dignity and his rank.'

CHAPTER XXX.

FREDERICK and Eschenbach led the astonished King to a seat, while the circle of knights opening by degrees, they all took their stations on opposite sides of the hall with their respective decorations—only on this occasion the hall was more superbly decorated than usual. The rich carpets which Corradin had bestowed on the knights were hung against the wall, and stretched on the steps leading to the throne where Farnsburg sat.

The young monarch looked around with wild surprise. He could not reconcile his present situation with that in which he had found himself but a moment before, and almost thought himself in a dream, if not already removed from the earth to a region of the blessed. After a long silence Count Farnsburg, rising quietly from his throne, addressed him in these words: 'My noble liege, we wait for your decision, and are anxious to know whether you still feel inclined to honour us so far as to wish to become a member of our order. We have tried you severely, for to him who has been tried can alone the gates of our hall be opened, and a monarch, still less than any other, should not be exempted from this rule, but you are still at liberty to recede, if you will, from your first intention.'

'Truly,' said the King, 'it was a severe trial, and thank God I did not sink under it, but am at length deemed worthy to belong to a band of heroes. Father, forgive me if I doubted your honour. Brothers, forgive me if I suspected your faith.'

'Forgive us also,' said Farnsburg, 'if we have seemingly sinned against the respect due to your Majesty, but you desire to become a son of the Lion, and I durst not act otherwise.

'This severe trial, however, has only shown you in still

brighter colours. Yet must I tell you, other trials still await you ere you can arrive at our higher dignities. But nature has her limits and must not be over-strained. In four times four days shall your other trials commence, but now it is your time to judge of us.'

At these words the knights divided themselves into four troops. The Inquisitor questioned, the Avenger answered; and the King's amazement every minute increased when he saw the wide extending influence of this order, their love of justice and virtue, and with what active zeal they opposed the torrent of vice and anarchy.

When the business of the day was ended, and the commander supported by his knights descended from the throne, the King advanced and declared himself ready to undergo any probation for the honour of belonging to such a society, nor could anything ever again induce him to doubt of their sincerity. 'Do not try it,' he added, 'for were I to see a thousand of your swords pointed against my breast, I would sooner disbelieve my own senses than that you were guilty of perfidy.'

Frederick thanked the King for his good opinion, whil old Farnsburg, smiling, desired him not to be too secure, or at least always to be upon his guard. On the following day a courier from the Archbishop of Mayence arrived at the Castle with a letter for King Frederick, the chief purport of which was to wish him joy of his arrival in Germany, and to say that he was then actively and successfully employed in turning the minds of the German princes to receive him favourably. 'One thing alone,' added the prelate, 'greatly puzzles me in the accomplishment of my plan, nor can I proceed without your advice and consent. The Bishop of Bamberg has greatly profited by the general anarchy, and seized on the estates of several knights. He now fears that, should you mount the Imperial throne, these whom he has reduced to want may seek redress from you, and that you may compel him to refund what he has thus acquired. He therefore declares that he will not only refuse you his own vote, but will also influence many of the others who are at his disposal, unless you bind yourself by a sacred promise to confirm him in all his present

possessions as soon as you shall mount the throne. Do in this as best seemeth to you; consult your conscience, and above all your prudence, for I must freely confess to you that my schemes and those of my friends in your favour will become perfectly useless if the bishop continues obstinate, and sets the example to many who like him have unjustly enriched themselves in these times of trouble. Do not, therefore, let overstrained scruples actuate your conscience. If you send me a written promise by which you insure to the bishop the fortresses, castles, and lands thus acquired, his powerful support, that of his friends, his towns, fortresses, and numerous troops—all will be at your disposal. If you take my advice you will accept his offers, and, act wisely in doing so, instead of following the probable opinion of the knights of the Lion, whose principles are too severe and unbending, and, however beautiful in a speculative and theoretic point of view, are in no wise calculated for practice in the present age. Indeed, I must own that, should you not comply, I fear I shall be obliged, however unwillingly, to withdraw myself from your cause. As this is an affair which cannot brook delay, I request you may send an answer by the courier who will deliver this.'

The King read this letter over and over again with the utmost attention. He saw the necessity of deliberating maturely before he should come to any determination on a matter of so much importance. Not only the ultimate success of all his views seemed to depend upon it, but also his future glory and the good opinion of the world, so necessary for a monarch whose every action is liable to the severest scrutiny. He determined, therefore, to request the advice of his friends before he should come to any ultimate decision, and for that purpose repaired to the old commander, who was then reposing in his apartment, and, after unfolding to him the circumstances of the case, requested to have his opinion. The old man declined giving any advice, on the plea that the Bishop of Bamberg being one of his oldest friends, he could not venture to promise that his opinion in such a case would be totally unbiassed. He also affected to doubt the truth of the Archbishop's accusations against his friend, although he

allowed there might have been some grounds for them, but not to the extent insinuated in his letter, while at the same time he assured the King that the power of the prelate was almost unbounded, and might be either of the highest benefit or utmost prejudice to him in his claims upon the Imperial throne. 'However,' continued the old man, 'I again repeat it: you must in this case act according to your own ideas of justice and prudence, as I will on no account attempt to sway your determination.'

On leaving Farnsburg's apartment the King long balanced between the powerful insinuations of ambition, which, as already remarked, formed the leading trait of his character, and the unerring dictates of rectitude and honour; but the contest, though severe, was of short duration. He seized a pen and soon wrote an answer with these latter feelings, and, before the hour of assembling in the hall, had dispatched it by the messenger.

He had scarcely finished this trying duty when Eschenbach entered his apartment to take leave of the King, as he had been unexpectedly summoned away to attend his father in his last moments. He told Frederick that he should leave Adelgunda behind him, as he did not wish to distress her tender feelings by conducting her to such a scene of sorrow. He therefore recommended her to the protection of the King during an absence which he trusted would be of short duration.

In compliance with Eschenbach's request, the young King took his place by Adelgunda at table, endeavouring by his animated conversation to keep up her spirits and prevent her thoughts from wandering to the present melancholy employment of her absent lover. She smiled thankfully on him, and even in some degree clothed her own replies in that gallantry which invariably tinctured Frederick's discourse when directed towards her, while the knights continued to carouse in the fashion of the times.

The King, more accustomed to the refined and effeminate manners of Italy, rose from table and wandered about the gardens to enjoy the beauties of a mild evening. He was

still meditating on the subject which had that day almost entirely engrossed his attention, and figuring to himself the probable consequences of his reply to the Archbishop, when his eye caught at a distance the folds of a white satin robe fluttering among the bushes. Curiosity made him approach with as little noise as possible, and he perceived Adelgunda clothed in new beauty and approaching him in a pensive attitude. Her long black tresses were only ornamented by a few wild flowers disposed in an elegant and fantastic manner, a single rose blushed in her bosom, while she scattered about its leaves, unconscious of what she was doing. On perceiving the King, who was now close to her side, she started back.

'Lovely Adelgunda,' said the King, 'shrink not thus from the approach of your protector, else will he think you repent of his office.'

Adelgunda sighed deeply. 'Comfort, my liege, was never more needed than at this moment. I was thinking on the orange groves of Sicily, and in imagination breathing their fragrance. Alas! my wayward fancy has never ceased to conjure up the delightful scenes of my childhood since your generous clemency opened my return to those happy regions.'

'But why should you not often revisit them in the society of your husband?'

'Alas! often have I thought so,' said she, 'and even ventured to propose it to Eschenbach, but on this subject he seems to have some unaccountable prejudice. He says his duties chain him to this land, and even wishes me to part with those possessions which your goodness has bestowed on me, that their produce may be employed in extending his paternal domains in this country.

'Eschenbach possesses all the manlier virtues that can adorn his sex; but, nurtured amid camps and scenes of arms, his rough manners are but little calculated, are but little formed, to ensure the felicity of a heart tremblingly alive to love and sensibility and sighing for a kindred soul. The heart of a German is, like his native oak, generous and hardy, but rough and unpliant; and his manners, like his climate, strike

chilly to the bosom of a Sicilian. Alas! when I contemplate the approach of winter and the gloomy halls and giant oaks, my heart shudders and recoils within itself.'

'Ah, lovely lady,' said the King, 'speak not so; the absence of your lord has made your heart feel empty, and made you too apt to contemplate the shaded side of the picture. In the arms of a man who loves you with such fond affection, external objects will speedily be forgotten.'

'Affection!' said she; 'ah, my lord, the fire of heaven can communicate no portion of its warmth to the drifted snow. No, Eschenbach's love possesses not the fervour my heart requires. Did you not remark how hastily he left me?—with hardly an adieu, and not one word of love.'

'Adelgunda, the warmth of your own feelings renders you unjust. Remember he was summoned to attend a dying parent, and that the sacred calls of duty cannot too speedily be obeyed; and did he not, with the most anxious solicitude, entrust you to my protection?'

'Surely the time required to make that request might have as well been employed in saying farewell to me,' said she half resentfully.

'Alas! lovely Adelgunda, I find I can make but a bad pleader in such a cause, and that reason easily sinks before the warmer feelings of the heart. I can no longer act the hypocrite—those feelings I have long attempted to smother will have vent. Yes, loveliest of women, beauties such as thine were never formed to be buried in the cold regions of the North. Thy sister lives and beckons thee to Sicily, where alone thy charms can be worshipped as they deserve, and where the monarch will be proud to throw himself at thy feet, and wear thy chains.'

'Oh!' cried she, 'seek not to seduce a heart perhaps but too willing to listen to your flattery. Ah, how gladly would I follow where you lead—not to rule, but own myself the humblest of your handmaids.'

'Are you not free?' said the King. 'Who can prevent you following the dictates of your inclinations? Be only firm and rely on my protection and assistance.'

'Alas! am I not betrothed to Eschenbach?' sighed Adelgunda.

'Betrothed! Ay, but not yet wedded. It is the blessing of the priest that alone can tie the indissoluble knot,' said Frederick.

'But I have promised him my love; I have for ever plighted my faith,' she groaned.

'Did he not plight the same, and how has he kept it?' asked the King.

'I can, however, accuse him of no crime, nor has he willingly deceived me, although his coldness and indifference are alike insupportable to me,' exclaimed the beautiful lady.

'If you feel so, in pity's sake fly while 'tis yet time; hasten before a hated union has rendered flight impossible,' pleaded the King.

'Flight would ill become a noble Sicilian. To such meanness I cannot stoop,' she said.

'You mistake me, lovely Adelgunda; I meant not like a culprit.'

'Ah, my liege, say no more. Your words are but too dangerous; in pity to me forbear. Alas! it is perhaps my own heart that I have cause to dread more than your persuasions. Be generous then, nor push a conquest when I own your power.'

'O God!' he cried, 'is this the language of Adelgunda's heart, who but a little since declared herself the child of passion? O God! a new prospect opens upon me—this would be too much happiness. Oh, speak, enchantress, and say why this dislike to your intended union—oh, in pity's sake speak, for my soul is on the rack!'

'As you regard my peace, my lord, oh calm those transports. Thus far will I own, that should I ever seek to break my present fetters, to you will I fly for consolation.' At these words Adelgunda attempted to retire, but the King flung himself before her, and pressing her hand to his lips, while the burning tears streamed from his eyes, cried: 'No, loveliest, most adored of women, leave me not thus, in a state of doubt

and madness. On your words now hangs the balance of life or death; oh, speak, and speak comfort to my agonised soul!'

'What do you wish, my lord? What would you have me say?' asked Adelgunda.

'Ah, too well you know,' he replied. 'I dare not ask, I only beg; but ere you speak I will lay my whole heart open before you, and if a sight of its sufferings can claim your pity I shall be supremely blessed. Adelgunda, do you remember that evening which can never be effaced from my bosom, when you promised me your love, and for a father's life held out a bribe that might have thawed the holiest anchorite? Long ere then had I loved thee with the tenderest passion, though chastened by that respect thy virtues claimed, but at that moment who can describe the volcano that raged in my breast? 'Twas madness, 'twas delirium, all. Yet with gigantic strength I struggled. I respected your saint-like sorrow, your unspotted innocence, and smothering my desires parted with you as I thought for ever. My triumph, lovely maid, was short, and love soon reclaimed his rights; your image if possible enhanced by fancy haunted my thoughts sleeping or waking. In the visions of the night I beheld you ready to sink into my arms; my outstretched arms grasped a vacancy, and when I woke I found the pillow deluged with my tears. In vain I sought to banish your remembrance in the society of the loveliest maids of Sicily, but the barb had struck where no human power could reach.

'When, after a lapse of many months, I again beheld you by the side of Eschenbach, when I recognised the lovely bud expand to the full-blown rose, I would in vain describe the mingled feelings of the moment: but when I heard from your own lips that you were for ever lost to me, that those beauties were destined for the arms of another, I felt every word strike to my heart, and all that I had hitherto suffered was as nothing to the horrors of that moment. Yet even then I loved you with an affection so pure, so free from every human and selfish feeling, that I almost rejoiced because I conceived you to be happy and resolved to suffer in silence. But now, when I behold the frozen heart of Eschenbach insensible to all his

happiness, 'twere madness to be silent; my honest heart must speak its feelings. Superior to all your sex in virtue as in beauty, you rejected the love of Corradin, because he was an enemy to your faith. Behold now at your feet, you angelic maid, another monarch who offers you the sceptre of Sicily, who hopes to place upon your brow the imperial diadem, and whose prayers shall rise in unison with yours to the God of your fathers. Ah, do not spurn him, Adelgunda! Attempt not to struggle against the decrees of fate that have destined you for a throne, and do not despise the pleadings of a heart that beats but for you alone.'

Adelgunda hastily raised him. 'O God! in pity's sake, my lord, rise and quit that unworthy posture. In pity to Adelgunda, leave me. Think but if any of the knights should see us thus, I must be lost for ever. I am yet in their power, and even your influence were vain to screen me from their stern vengeance.'

'Incomprehensible woman, see how quickly your slave obeys you. Be merciful then, and reward me with one little glimpse of hope.'

'I will be at least sincere,' she said, 'if I can be no more; this hope, were I to grant it, might cost me dear. Can you, my lord, conceive me vain enough to believe even for a moment that the King of Sicily, the future Emperor of Germany, would condescend to pollute his noble blood, and raise the daughter of the banished Count Zealano to the throne? And if not, could you think me base enough to sink to the rank of his mistress?'

'If this is your only objection, then, lovely Adelgunda, hope is not extinct, and here I swear by that Almighty Power which created and now hears me that, whatever dignity heaven may have yet in store for me, I covet only as I can share it with you, and if the empire of the world were in my grasp I would lay it at your feet.'

'Ah, my King, tempt not further a weak woman. Help me to combat myself. Even should your generous love elevate me to the throne, do you think that your Sicilians would suffer a maid, sprung from a stock which they detest, to share your

diadem? or can you imagine that the haughty Germans would bend the knee to one so little known?—No, my lord—Or even obscure your glory, and pave the way for future miseries? Leave me to a fate which is now inevitable; remember, too, that you are in treaty with the King of Arragon for the hand of his daughter the fair Constantia. Must it fall to my lot to remind you of this?'

'I do not deny it,' he said; 'but only grant me hopes and here I swear that this treaty, which, thank heaven, is as yet only in its infancy, shall be speedily broken off. For what is Constantia to me, or what the whole world compared to you, who are in yourself all perfection?'

She yielded. 'Well, you have conquered; I will yet strive to escape this hated tie, I will endeavour to convince Eschenbach that heaven has not formed us for each other, and that we would in vain look for happiness in a union, and will gladly offer him all my treasures to release me from my word. But you I will bind by no oaths. If I succeed in breaking my fetters, then, my lord, will Adelgunda wait her doom at your hands. Need I say more? Meantime let our present conversation remain locked in your own bosom, nor be surprised should I leave the Castle ere to-morrow. I will hasten to Eschenbach and at once assail him with entreaties, as I may have a better chance of success when separated from his friends and advisers. And now, farewell; at all events we meet again, when you shall know the result.'

'Yet, Adelgunda,' said Frederick, 'ere you leave me receive the thanks of a grateful heart. Oh, you have made me blessed indeed, and my future life shall be devoted to prove the extent of my gratitude.'

Adelgunda smiled. 'I deserve no thanks as yet; time will show how far I may afterwards be entitled to them.' As she said this she lightly tripped away, and escaped from the King's arms which were stretched out to press her to his bosom. He felt disappointed, yet did not attempt to follow her, as he feared to be observed from the Castle, and felt satisfied by the triumph he had already obtained over a woman, whom he had loved even from childhood, and who had formerly been in-

debted to the stern virtue of Frederick, more than his own forbearance, for her escape from becoming a prey to the violence of his passions. The young King's love of women formed a striking feature in his character, and all the historians of that age have agreed in describing him as generous, just, noble, and valiant, but at the same time as totally unable to resist the pleadings of female beauty or of their siren voices, which but too often led him to infringe on many of his most sacred duties.

At supper Adelgunda did not as usual take her place by the King, but took an opportunity as she passed him unobserved to whisper that she feared his impetuosity might betray him too soon, and that she besought him to act with the greatest prudence.

CHAPTER XXXI.

On the following morning Adelgunda had left the Castle to join Eschenbach, and the King was ready to attend a hunting party which had been arranged for his amusement; but he did not feel alarmed by this circumstance, as she had already prepared him for her precipitate departure, and joined the hunters in the highest spirits.

The knights who attended him on reaching the forest dispersed on all sides to surround the place where the game was expected. Frederick had already succeeded in destroying two wolves and a bear, when he was attracted by a stag which bursting from a thicket fled through an open glade of the forest, and, as the rest of the hunters were at that moment employed in attacking a bear of a monstrous size, Frederick, clapping spurs to his horse, followed on the traces of the stag. After a chase which lasted upwards of an hour, the dogs fastened on the haunches of the deer, when Frederick coming in pierced him with his hunting spear and carried off his branching antlers in triumph. By this time some of the chasseurs, who had with difficulty followed his traces, came up, and to his astonishment informed him that he was a full day's journey from the Castle of the Lion by the nearest route, and that to reach it in that time would require fresh horses, as those that they had ridden, fatigued as they were, could not perform the journey in less than two.

The sun was already fast sinking towards the horizon, and Frederick felt himself considerably exhausted by the fatigues of the day. In this situation the chasseurs recommended him to walk his horse gently towards a hostelry which lay at about the distance of a league, where he would be certain of finding

tolerable accommodation for the night, if not even fresh horses and a guide to conduct him back to the Castle. The King gladly availed himself of this advice, and, although his horse was so thoroughly exhausted that he found himself obliged to walk on foot the whole of the way, he reached the hostelry before night. As he wished to conceal his name and rank, he enjoined the foresters to treat him as a companion, and one of their own rank. On entering the house he was shown into an apartment where over the embers of a wood fire were seated two knights and a friar regaling themselves with a stoup of wine.

Frederick and his companions seated themselves at a table on the opposite side of the fire, when the strangers offered them a share of their beverage and entered into conversation. On being told that they were foresters belonging to the Castle of the Lion, one of the strangers expressed his pleasure at meeting with them, as he was actually journeying towards the same place on business of the utmost importance. He then inquired of the pretended chasseur if he could inform him whether the King of Sicily was still there, seeming particularly anxious to learn his character and pursuits at the Castle of the Lion.

Frederick, desirous of learning the nature of their business in connection with Farnsburg, now informed them that he was himself in fact a noble Sicilian, who had accompanied that monarch to this country, and enjoyed his unlimited confidence, and therefore requested to know what might be their errand.

From this statement the stranger knights were in hopes of procuring for themselves a powerful advocate with the King, and therefore hesitated not to communicate the subject of their mission, which one of them explained in these words: 'You and your master probably already know that the Archbishop of Cologne is one of the warmest partisans and supporters of Otto the Saxon, and that he has been instrumental in making some of the German princes recall those oaths of allegiance which they had profusely given to your master while yet an infant. If your King feels this insult as he ought, he

will be happy to avail himself of the opportunity of revenge which now offers itself.'

'My master,' replied Frederick, 'certainly feels such injuries as becomes a prince, but a desire of vengeance, I well know, is foreign to his nature.'

'Hear all I have to say first,' interrupted the stranger, 'and till then suspend your judgment. We come ambassadors from the Landgrave of Hesse to your master, to offer him not only his vote, but also to place at his disposal all his strongholds and troops, provided the King will, in return, promise him help and protection against his inveterate foe, the Archbishop of Cologne.'

'How can the King promise him this,' asked Frederick, 'when he himself stands so much in need of support, and has not actually a single soldier at his disposal in this country?'

The stranger replied: 'Through the assistance of the knights of the Lion, whose powerful services we know he can command. A very short time would suffice to clear the Landgrave from his present difficulties, and when once the Archbishop is humbled, then your King need no longer fear his power, as the preliminary article in any terms which may be granted him shall be his renouncing all connection with Otto, and giving his vote for your young King. Your master will thus be certain of gaining a complete footing in the dominions of the Landgrave, as well as those of the Archbishop of Mayence, while they will at the same time serve as a rallying point for his faithful subjects.'

Frederick answered: 'Your proposal, Sir Knight, I must confess, embraces most tempting offers for the King, my master, and I will willingly recommend it to his mature consideration.'

'I thank you,' said the strange knight, 'for your promise, and request you may employ your utmost interest, as the business is urgent and may entirely depend upon dispatch. The Archbishop is at this moment making dreadful havoc in our country, and, as the Landgrave is particularly ill provided with cavalry, he cannot oppose him openly in the field.'

'When did this feud begin?' Frederick asked, 'and what was its original cause?'

A monk, one of the party, answered: 'The first resentment of the Archbishop was called down in consequence of the indifference or rather enmity which our prince displayed to the interests of Otto, and hostilities were even actually resorted to on the Landgrave's refusing to permit some of Otto's troops to pass through his dominions.'

The knight said: 'What you mention, reverend father, may indeed be the origin and cause of the hatred existing between the two princes, but the real cause of the feud must be sincerely told, if we are to expect assistance; for the truth must be ultimately known, and might, if concealed till then, materially injure the cause for which we are striving. Hear then, noble Sicilian, but judge not too rashly.

'The Archbishop of Cologne has a sister towards whom he felt the tenderest affection, and for whose welfare and establishment he has ever been most anxious. Her husband, one of the first nobility of Cologne, died about a twelvemonth ago, and left her in possession of his extensive dominions. Her riches and still more her beauty, which exceeds all description, attracted numerous admirers, who sought to win her to a second marriage, but in this view none has hitherto succeeded.

'Meanwhile the fame of her charms having reached the ears of our Landgrave, who, although a husband and a father of four children, is, I am sorry to say, in nowise blind to the attractions of other women, he became most anxious to behold this paragon of beauty, the famed Matilda. I accompanied him along with several other knights to Cologne, where he remained incognito, but being a prince of most enterprising disposition, and one who rather courts than shuns danger, he soon contrived to gain admittance to the palace, and saw the lovely Matilda, whose charms in his mind far exceeded the idea he had formed in his own heated imagination. Every hour added fresh fuel to his flame, and his fury may be easily fancied when his scrutinising eye discovered that her heart was already disposed of in favour of a young knight. Rendered desperate by this discovery, the Landgrave, at one of the public huntings which were given in honour of

Matilda, defied his rival to single combat, and after a desperate duel laid him dead at his feet. They had fought in a remote part of the forest, where none had witnessed the combat, and, although the young man's body was found on the following day, the cause or manner of his death remained an unaccountable mystery.

'The Landgrave maintained a perfect silence on the subject, and even attempted to ingratiate himself with Matilda by pretending to participate in her grief, but she disdained his consolations and even seemed to shrink involuntarily from his approach. Enraged at this, the Landgrave, finding that neither entreaties nor the most ardent proofs of affection were likely to move her, determined to acquire by force that which he found he must for ever despair of obtaining by gentler means. I was commissioned by him to procure fifty of the troopers on whose steadiness I could most completely rely, and place them in ambush a little beyond the gates of the city, there to await the arrival of Matilda, who often sought to dissipate the remembrance of her loss in solitude, under the pretence of pursuing the chase, but in reality to visit the spot where her lover had fallen, and then, after dismissing her attendants on some pretext or other, she used to spend many hours in weeping over his mysterious fate.

'One morning, everything being in readiness, I took my station at the appointed spot, and on a signal given by the Landgrave we rushed out and surprised Matilda on her knees and bathed in tears. Before she was aware of our approach, I had seized her in my arms, and attempted to stop her mouth to prevent her screams from being overheard, but the Landgrave would not permit such an indignity to be offered to her, whatever the consequence might be. Her attendants, alarmed by her screams, hurried to her assistance, and, in spite of our superior numbers, hesitated not to attack us. The contest was short, but, fearing that we might be overpowered by the rest of the knights who were dispersed through the forest, we were obliged to seek our safety in flight, leaving the bodies of our wounded companions on the field of battle. The fainting Matilda was placed before one

of the knights, and hastening through the most unfrequented parts of the forest, before night we found ourselves beyond the reach of pursuit. By this time Matilda was so thoroughly exhausted by continued faintings that we found it impossible to proceed without endangering her life. We accordingly resolved to halt where we were and allow her a few hours' repose.

'Here for the first time also we had an opportunity of ascertaining our loss in the skirmish, which we found to amount to ten common troopers besides one knight, and had only to hope that they had been killed, and might not fall alive into the hands of the Archbishop, who might otherwise extort from them a confession of their employer, a confession from which the Landgrave had reason to apprehend the most dreadful consequences.

CHAPTER XXXII.

'BEFORE break of day on the following morning we continued our flight, while at the same time the Landgrave dispatched two of his troopers, under the disguise of peasants, back to Cologne, to gain every possible information and learn whether the real abductors of Matilda were suspected. Towards evening they joined us at a spot retired from the great road which the Landgrave had appointed, and agreeably surprised us by the intelligence that the carrying off of Matilda seemed to be totally unknown in the city, and that the Archbishop most probably wished to hush up the whole affair for fear of injuring the lady's reputation.

'Meanwhile the Landgrave, to chide the suspicious jealousy of his wife, had Matilda secretly conveyed to one of his hunting seats, and after munificently rewarding each of the troopers who had assisted him in this expedition, bound them by the most solemn oaths to carry the secret with them to their graves. That my long absence might not excite suspicion, I only remained at the Castle for a few days, nor did I return to it till the Archbishop had sent a herald at arms to demand satisfaction and the restitution of our captive. What we had feared had actually come to pass. Our wounded companions having fallen into the hands of the enemy, the Archbishop had applied the most excruciating tortures till he forced a confession from them; but he cunningly concealed the discovery he had made for some time and collected all his forces for the purpose of taking an exemplary revenge, and when at length everything was in readiness, and his troops actually on the frontiers of the Landgrave's states, he sent forward his herald with his summons couched in the most haughty and

threatening language. As we were entirely unprepared to meet the Archbishop in the field, I advised my master to comply with his request, and restore the lady he had taken prisoner; but the impassioned lover lent a deaf ear to my counsel, and before three days had elapsed the Archbishop had advanced within a few leagues of the fortress, marking his progress by massacre and conflagration and sparing neither age nor sex. A party of our knights who were hastening to our assistance were encountered by a party of the enemy infinitely superior in numbers and almost entirely cut off, and a very few only reached the fortress which we were now endeavouring to put into some state of defence.

'Meanwhile our artful enemy had insidiously spread through the country the real cause of the feud, and took particular care that it should reach the ears of the Landgrave's wife, who in her jealous fury used every endeavour to prevent every species of succour from reaching her husband.

'The enemy had now reached the heights which commanded the fortress and begun to open a siege of it in due form; but conscious that it could only hold out for a very few days in its present situation, and fearful of falling into the hands of his implacable enemy, the Landgrave, on the approach of night, effected his escape by means of a subterranean passage, which was luckily unknown to the enemy.

'In the course of this retreat I again saw Matilda for the first time since the day in which I had assisted in carrying her off, but now she appeared to accompany my master willingly, and to be as anxious as he to escape from the pursuit of her brother. I could also plainly perceive that she was with child which accounted for the change in her disposition towards the Landgrave.'

The monk here interrupted: 'You must allow me, Sir Knight, to explain this circumstance, as I alone am acquainted with a mystery which chance disclosed to me at the time I lived with the Landgrave in the character of domestic chaplain. He had, it seems, continued the deceit which he had originally practised on Matilda and still passed himself on her as a simple knight of considerable fortune, and one at liberty

to offer his hand, and, finding that he had no hopes of enjoying her on his own terms, hesitated not to propose marriage. Whether Matilda had by this time come to love her abductor, or whether she feared that he might some day seek to obtain by force what he now craved in a lawful way, I cannot pretend to say; but she certainly gave her consent to receive him as a husband, and a needy priest who was sent for from a distance, and who was personally acquainted with neither of the parties, was bribed by a magnificent reward to perform the ceremony secretly and without making any inquiries.'

'Ah!' exclaimed the King. 'Shameful indeed thus to trifle with the most sacred sacrament. And pray, reverend father, how did the unhappy lady bear the discovery of this infamous treachery?'

'You surely call it, Sir, by much too harsh a name,' said the knight. 'In love as in war all stratagems are allowable. But I see you frown, and that on this speculative point we are not likely to agree. I will therefore hasten to answer your question.

'The lady has never yet discovered the deception, and continues happy in her ignorance, and, if your King consents to grant the assistance we expect from him, will most probably never have the slightest suspicion. She has been told that the Archbishop, her brother, has scornfully rejected every proposition towards reconciliation made by the man whom she now regards as her lawful lord, and even loves with the fondest affection. She has even written many letters to her brother endeavouring to soften him with the assurance that she was perfectly happy and contented with her lot, and sincerely loved her husband. These letters, as you will of course conceive, were never forwarded, although a supposed messenger always appeared before her, with pretended verbal answers fraught with the most injurious expressions, and threatening her with the most signal vengeance should she persist in remaining with her husband.

'This supposed behaviour of the Archbishop only tended to increase Matilda's love towards the Landgrave, whom she

regarded as unjustly persecuted on her account, so that in the midst of feuds and bloodshed the Landgrave enjoys all the sweets of real love. She regards him as a rich and powerful Baron cruelly and unjustly oppressed by the Archbishop, and believes that we are at this moment gone to crave the assistance of the Landgrave of Hesse in behalf of her and her husband.'

'But where,' asked the King, 'is the Landgrave, and where the unfortunate Matilda at present?'

The knight replied: 'In a strong and well-provided fortress, in which he might hold out for many months were it not for want of provisions, of which he cannot obtain a supply till he is assisted by a body of cavalry, which may keep the enemy at bay, till provisions are conveyed into the fortress.

'Now, Sir Knight, if you are, as you say, a confidential friend of your King, you will advise him to a step replete with such manifest advantages to him, and which must necessarily ensure him the Imperial crown before a twelvemonth be elapsed.'

'Yes,' answered the King; 'I am well aware of all these advantages and will certainly state them fully to my master.'

They continued to converse on the same subject till a late hour, and, after a short repose granted to nature, the King accompanied by his new companions and furnished with a fresh horse, which the chasseurs had procured for him, set off at daybreak for the Castle of the Lion, and rode with such speed that its turrets were already in view ere the sun had sunk below the horizon. They were met by a large party of the knights headed by Frederick, who the moment he recognised the King pushed forward his jaded steed, shouting: 'Welcome, a thousand times, my noble King and master. Thank God, we have at length found you! Many of your friends are still scouring the forest in search of you in the most dreadful anxiety, nor has a sound of mirth been heard in the Castle since your departure. We feared you had fallen into the hands of your enemies, and nothing could equal our uneasiness or the sorrow of the ladies who have been in tears ever since.'

While the King was deeply affected by these proofs of real

affection, the stranger knights who accompanied him stood amazed to find that they had all along been conversing with the King himself while they only conceived him to be a simple knight.

They accordingly approached the King with the most submissive air and craved his forgiveness for the liberty with which, unconscious of his real rank, they had treated him, and he, with that graceful courtesy which marked even his slightest actions, assured them that they had never offended, and that he should be most happy if they would accompany him to the Castle, where they should receive his final answer.

The gates of the fortress were thrown back with eager joy on the approach of the King, and its inhabitants all flew to welcome his return, and express the sincere uneasiness his absence had created.

Frederick thanked his friends for their affectionate concern, and related to them the manner in which the ardour of his pursuit after the stag had led him to such a distance as to preclude all possibility of a return for that night.

After thus satisfying their anxious inquiries, he requested to see the commander alone, and, retiring with him to a private apartment, recounted how he had met accidentally with the knights of Hesse and the purport of their embassy, while he requested Farnsburg's advice how he ought to act in the important business. The old Count listened with the utmost attention, but smiled in silence. 'So then you will not advise me,' said the young monarch.

'How can I?' replied the Count; 'you must see as well as I that the Landgrave's conduct has been most unjustifiable.'

'Of that,' answered Frederick, 'I am but too sensible. I will therefore at once inform the ambassadors that the knights of the Lion never can lend their aid in support of an unjust feud.'

'But,' interrupted Farnsburg, 'will not such an answer in your present situation be too rash and precipitate? Have you thoroughly weighed all the advantages that must accrue to you by agreeing to their request?

'As to what regards us, let that in no wise influence your

determination. We have already sworn to assist you to the utmost of our power in establishing your just rights, nor can anything induce us to depart from our engagement. Therefore, as your compliance with the Landgrave's wish must greatly promote your interest, you have only to lay your commands on us, and to-morrow's sun shall behold as many of my knights as you may choose to order ready to proceed to the assistance of the Landgrave.'

'And would you, my lord, really advise me to such a measure?' asked the King.

'Nay, my liege, I advise not,' replied the old veteran. 'I have only fairly stated both views of the subject, and left you to form your own resolution. But permit me to add that, born as you are to a crown, you must seldom, if even ever, expect to meet with disinterested advisers within the precincts of a court. Such cases as the present will often occur to you in the course of your reign, and you will find as many different opinions as you may choose to listen to advisers. Everyone will be eager to counsel; but private interest will probably dictate the opinions of all, and it will be left to you to form your own determination, and decide between evil and good. On your nod will often depend the fate of thousands, who are bound by the most sacred oaths to respect your person and implicitly obey your will; and your voice must lead them to fight in the cause of justice, or to raise their swords in support of tyranny and oppression. Yours, and not theirs, therefore, must be the responsibility, both in this world and the next, if their arms have been raised in defence of injustice, or their blood shed in the destruction of innocence.'

'I understand you, my worthy friend,' interrupted the King, 'and will act accordingly.'

As he said this, he quitted the apartment precipitately, and commanded the attendance of the strangers. He remained with them for some time in close conference, after which they left him, with evident marks of discontent; nor would they consent to remain for the banquet, to which the hospitality of old Farnsburg had invited them.

At table the King took his place in profound silence, while an expression of dissatisfaction sat on his features, which neither the marked attention of the women nor the animated conversation of the sprightly Agnes could in any wise dispel. He rose from the banquet early, as was his usual custom, and accompanied Farnsburg in his evening walk. The Count, availing himself of the privilege old age and the unbounded confidence of the King had given him, ventured to inquire into the cause of his apparent discontent, and to ask the nature of the answer which he had returned to the emissaries of the Landgrave.

'It is not that answer,' replied the King, 'which occasions my present uneasiness, for never were my heart and conscience better satisfied than at this moment. I sent my greeting to the Landgrave, and advised him by all means to terminate as speedily as possible this unjust feud, and make every possible reparation to the Archbishop, whom he had so deservedly irritated; while I added that he could not possibly expect my assistance, or that of the knights of the Lion, since I should act unjustly, and make a very improper use of that friendship they had generously profferred me, were I to implicate them in an unjust feud, and thus tarnish their long-established glory.'

Farnsburg, raising his hands to heaven, exclaimed: 'O my God! I thank Thee, I thank Thee, All-bountiful and Almighty Being, that Thou hast at last taken compassion on my wretched country, and in Thy divine mercy sent us a ruler from afar who will spread the blessings of peace over her lacerated bosom. Let me embrace thee, my royal son, nor disdain an old man's blessing, who is proud to strain you to his heart, and feels all the affection of the tenderest parent, while he seems to forget the distance of a subject. But let me ask once more why this sorrow; for sure you cannot repent of having acted in this manner?'

'No, no, my kind father,' replied the King, 'for to call you so shall ever be my pride; but I fear lest the heat and impetuosity of youth may have led me astray.

'When the knights of Hesse had heard my determination,

and with a certain degree of insolence assured me that I had now for ever made the Landgrave my enemy, and that I might rely that during his life I should never mount the throne of Germany, my presence of mind, I fear, forsook me, and, forgetting that I am as yet but a stranger in this land, I exposed myself to become the derision of my enemies by making menaces which I may, perhaps, never have it in my power to fulfil. My heart now tells me that the feeble should never threaten, and I feel ashamed of my own impetuosity when I reflect that I told the ambassadors unless their Landgrave immediately restored the injured Matilda, I would ere long compel him to it at the head of all my forces—at which they scornfully asked where all these boasted forces were to be found. This insolent reply has, I confess, ever since wounded my pride, and rendered me unfit for any enjoyment.'

'With what joy, my liege,' replied Farnsburg, 'would I not assist you with all my power to prove to this Landgrave that the King of Sicily—the chosen Emperor of Germany—has it in his power to chastise those who transgress the laws of justice within this land, did I not foresee that by so doing we should only strengthen the power and influence of your most formidable enemy, the Archbishop of Cologne, who is one of Otto's most faithful partisans, and to assist him now in that feud, from which alone we can hope his overthrow, would be merely heaping coals on your own head.'

'Forgive me, father,' interrupted the King, 'if I venture to differ from you in opinion, but undoubtedly a king, who has been invested with power for the protection of innocence, is not allowed to weigh his own interest, and profit by any fortuitous circumstance of this kind. Would not you yourself—would not the whole kingdom, and deservedly too—execrate my memory were I to protect only my favourites, and quietly look on while those whom I did not consider as particularly attached to my person were oppressed and wronged? Ah, had I but an army at this moment before the walls of your Castle, I would soon hasten to punish this brutal ravisher, and if fortune should permit me to deliver him in fetters to his antagonist the Archbishop, I would fly from his thanks,

and thus enjoy the noblest of all triumphs in having obliged my enemy, and still leaving him at liberty to oppose me if he would.'

'Far be it from me,' cried Farnsburg, 'to oppose so noble a determination. Your wish, my liege, shall be instantly fulfilled, and my whole force of knights ready to follow wherever you may wish to lead them. The period I had fixed for your reception into our order shall be shortened, and if it pleases you, your trials commence to-morrow. Should you succeed, as I sincerely hope and believe, in all of them, then will you enter our society, not merely as a member, but a leader, and may on the following day march at the head of your own troops to assist the Archbishop of Cologne. The Prelate of Mayence is already in your interest, and in his states will you find ready assistance and the means of penetrating into the country of Hesse, while you may at the same time inform the Archbishop of Cologne, by means of a courier, that at your request solely does the order of the Lion fight in his cause.'

The King received this offer with undescribable joy, while he thanked the old Count and assured him he had now most completely fulfilled the devoutest wish of his heart. They continued to converse on the same subject for a considerable time longer, and Frederick listened with filial reverence to the advice the old Count gave him as to the measures he ought to observe in the expedition against the Landgrave, and the most effectual means of conciliating the minds of the different German Princes. The summons to attend the evening repast at length put an end to the conference. When all the knights were assembled at the banquet, it was publicly announced that on the morrow at the eighth hour the King of Sicily should be received into the order. All wished the new candidate success on the occasion, and pledged him in full goblets, while the ladies conveyed their good wishes to the same purpose in gentle smiles.

While all the inhabitants of the Castle were sunk in repose the King, filled with anxious anticipations of the morrow paced his apartment with hurried steps. He had already undergone one severe trial, and feared that those he had now

to suffer might be yet more terrible. Still, however, he burned with a noble ardour to pass the dreadful ordeal, and reap the rich harvest that must crown his ultimate success, and determined, should he not succeed, to forego every claim to the Imperial throne, and return to Sicily as totally unworthy of ruling over men who had proved themselves so much his superiors in every manly endowment.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE stained casements already shone with the first rays of the rising sun, and the knights were bracing their harness, and those who had been summoned from a distance were entering the court, before the young King had thought of seeking his couch; and now, roused from his reverie by the blasts of the warders' horns, he was girding on his sword when Frederick and several other knights of the fourth order entered his apartment. He rejoiced to see the candidate already prepared and, addressing him in an impressive tone of voice, said:

'We are come, my liege, to lead you to the contest. Assume your wonted presence of mind, and summon all your innate courage to your aid, for if you expect to gain our highest marks of honour, and if we are to hail you as a chosen brother, you will have need of both.'

'What was possible to you,' replied the King with an undaunted look, 'I trust I may, through the help of the Almighty's protecting arm, hope also to obtain. Lead on.'

He was immediately conducted to the subterranean hall where all the knights were already assembled according to their respective orders. As soon as the King had taken the place appointed for him, the great bell was heard, and Count Farnsburg entering, attended by the different office-bearers, took his usual seat on the throne of the Lion, while the knights hailed him with four strokes on the boss of their shields. After a pause, and with that look which ever commanded silence and attention, he thus begun:

'Hail to the valiant order of the Lion! The Kings of the earth court his society, and seek admission to his den. Regard-

less of their rank, they submit their anointed heads to his bequests and think it glorious to be ranked among his children.' Then, turning to the King, he continued: 'Sire, we have granted you sufficient time to prove our actions, and meditate upon our conduct. Say have you done so? and do you still wish to become a brother of our order?'

'I have conned them well,' replied the King, 'and the examination has only made me more anxious for the honour of being called your son.'

'But,' returned the commander, 'do you prize what you are pleased to call an honour sufficiently to submit yourself to such trials as the others have undergone?'

'Yes,' said the King, 'it is through the well-earned path of glory alone that I seek to enter.'

'Then, my noble liege, my more than son,' exclaimed Farnsburg, rising from the throne, 'the contest is already past, you have run your appointed race, and the palm of victory awaits you. Leaders of the four bodies, go to your different posts, and prepare your badges of honour; anon I will call upon you to judge and to reward.'

The four leaders now left the hall by their respective gates, while only the anointed few remained and approached the upper end of the room and formed themselves on each side of the throne. In a few minutes a single stroke of the bell was heard, and the leader of the first order returned with his attendant knights, when the commander, bending from the throne, addressed the King in as follows:

'To support the tottering throne of Germany requires not personal bravery alone, surrounded as my poor country is by powerful enemies, and nourishing as she does within her own bosom numerous and concealed traitors who prey on her heart's best blood; she needs the assistance of a monarch at once brave and merciful, steady though lenient, and generous though not profuse. It would not therefore have been meet, my liege, to have essayed merely thy personal courage, or exposed thee to the war of the rude elements; from thee far other and far nobler duties were required. Devoted from thy cradle to wield a sceptre, thy baby brows were encircled

with a crown, and with the help of God thou must ere long ascend the Imperial throne. It became us, therefore, to prove whether thou mightest ever hereafter be induced to waste the strength of this order, or shed its blood in an unjust cause. The trial has been made, and thou hast been found most worthy.

'Lay then,' he said to the leader, 'your banner on the table and judge the royal candidate who must now approach it. You already know how severely we tried him, and with what heroic fortitude he emptied the poisoned chalice rather than basely forswear his birthright. To a prince so nobly endowed, to one inspired with such principles, our country may look up with confidence, and by this act alone did he prove himself worthy of our highest honours. But his probation stopped not here. In resisting the temptations held out in the forged letter from the Archbishop of Mayence, in rejecting the request of Bamberg's Bishop, though backed by so many flattering assurances, he gave the most convincing proofs that blind ambition guides not his steps, and that a crown even has no charms for him if he must snatch at it by wading through blood. Nay more, I even sought to increase the temptation by insidious advice, but, thanks to Almighty God, my hints were disregarded, my bribes despised, and I saw with delight that his ear would be ever shut against the advice of sycophants and flatterers, for thus did he answer the letter from Mayence. He declared that injustice, however masked, must yet be ever odious, and that he would rather for ever resign all claims to the German throne than mount it by trampling on the sacred laws of society, and that far from courting the bishop's vote, he would reject it if offered on such terms; and instead of courting his protection boldly declared that he should be the earliest object of his vengeance should he ever hold the reins of empire. Here is the writing; I trembled when it was first delivered to me, but my fears soon vanished and I kissed it with respect when the contents met my eye. Take it and let it be ever preserved in the archives of our order. Now speak and say whether you think the deed worthy of reward, and if you are willing to invest the royal youth with the badges of your order.'

The leader declared: 'Most worthy and deserving indeed do I think him of the reward, and only regret it is not my lot to bestow one more honourable.'

The commander rejoined: 'Go then, Sire, and receive the open casque of the Lion, and may it ever remind you of the noble action which procured it, and cover with it the head of oppressed innocence. Press it close against your ears when the voice of flattery would assail them, or a courtier seek to gain your sanction for an act of injustice. But draw it aside when the complaints of a sufferer sound from afar, for to such the ear of him who sitteth on the mercy seat should be ever open. Keep the vizor ever unclosed that your eagle eye may dash around and penetrate into the recesses of hidden vice. But that you may see how those who have now the honour of hailing you as brother can alone acquire the same badge, follow the leader who will conduct you along the path they had to tread.' The knight led the King by the embossed door to the small marble dungeon, from whence he descended with him into the subterranean cavern, and by means of torches displayed to him its immense extent, and the numerous artificial objects of horror collected within it to increase its ghastliness. They afterwards proceeded through the only issue at the further end, and, passing along the bank through the iron door which was again repaired, visited the infernal chasm, and after pausing for a time over the foaming cataract returned to the hall by another door completely concealed by the throne. The leader of the first order now retired with his companions, and the commander again addressing the King spoke as follows:

'Bolder and more reckless of danger than those who have now left the hall, and who trembled to pass the roaring flood, your Majesty beheld unmoved a precipice far more dangerous and slippery, that would in vain have checked your progress, and held on along the way that leads to glory, heedless of the torrent of passion that would have hurried you along in a stream far more impetuous than that from which they shrank. Leader of the second order approach. The King of Sicily claims a reward at thy hands. Hear then his plea, and judge if he

has deserved it. Lust is a vice perhaps the most natural but by far the most dangerous, the most disgraceful, that can stigmatise a true knight. It unmans alike his moral and physical powers. It enervates and debases the mind, and renders him the abject slave of the other sex. But if this vice should beset the man who is destined to hold the reins of government, it acquires new powers of evil, it is destruction. Like the frail reed which springing from pollution is the sport of every passing wind, he becomes the tool of a wanton, and, while the sceptre falls from his nerveless grasp, his coffers are exhausted to feed a set of mercenary hirelings and his subjects crushed to feed the extravagance of the most despicable of her sex. For she who can basely sell the brightest jewel she possesses—her chastity—has no other lot to arrest her in the career of vice; and virtue, honesty and merit, will be sacrificed to the highest bidder, while torrents of blood must flow to humour her caprice or further her pernicious designs.

'I reflected on this, and determined to try whether our future ruler could resist the voice of the siren. I had heard that the King did not behold the charms of the Countess of Zealano with an eye of indifference, and that he had even once nearly fallen a prey to her attractions and the temptation of an unguarded hour. She was now Eschenbach's betrothed bride, and had sworn eternal fidelity to him in the presence of the King himself. It became, therefore, his bounden duty to remind her of that oath should she ever seek to tempt him from the paths of honour by the allurements of love.'

At these words the King's colour changed from a deep crimson to a deadly paleness, but the commander, not remarking his evident emotion, continued: 'It cost me infinite trouble ere I could persuade the virtuous Adelgunda, even for so virtuous an end, to assume the appearance of vice or seem unfaithful for a moment to the husband of her affections. Eschenbach himself was obliged to join his entreaties, and even urge it as a proof of love and duty ere we could conquer her scruples. I afterwards instructed her how she was to demean herself in this unpleasant task, and from the moment I saw her depart on this unwilling embassy, I remained in a

state of the utmost suspense at a casement which overlooked the lime grove, and trembling lest I had submitted the candidate to a trial which exceeded the powers of human forbearance. At length I beheld her advancing with faltering steps and her handkerchief pressed to her eyes. I felt my blood shudder and almost dreaded her approach. At length she reached the place where I was standing; her cheeks were suffused with the deepest blushes, and a tear yet trembled in her eye.' At this part of the commander's discourse the King covered his face with his robe, and leant against a column for support while the other continued: 'For some minutes she appeared unable to speak, but at length, in a voice rendered indistinct by her sobs, she cried: "Thank God! my cruel task is fulfilled, and the friend of my youth, my more than King, is, as I expected, superior to every vice. It is I alone who have suffered. You have forced me to assume the garb of depravity, and I have met with the merited reward, and been forced to shrink abashed from the presence of him whose esteem I was most anxious to obtain. Then haste, my lord, and vindicate my character, as I can never venture again into his presence till the unsullied purity of my character has been restored." She then rushed from my presence to rejoin Eschenbach, but to-day she will again return, when I trust, my liege, you will generously pardon the unwilling deception she was induced to put upon you, and restore her to that place in your esteem of which she is so highly deserving.'

The King in great confusion said: 'I—oh, assuredly—I will—I ought rather to thank her—I must—she has made me her debtor for ever—I can never indeed forget this act.'

Then said the commander of the second order: 'You have now heard the nature of this second, this severe trial, you have beheld with what firmness the King resisted the allurements of such transcendent charms; say then, do you deem him worthy of the reward you have to bestow?'

He who was named their leader answered: 'I present this sword to his Majesty with the conviction that I have never girt it to the thigh of one more truly deserving, or better inclined to use it to the most glorious ends. In his possession

I *know* it will never be allowed to rust in its sheath, when wickedness and guilt should call it forth, but that it will ever be ready to gleam in the defence of oppressed innocence.'

After this ceremony the King was again conducted through the cavern, and, by a passage perforated through the rock, led to the edge of the torrent, below the precipice; and while he beheld, with a kind of pleasing terror, the beetling cliff which the candidates had to descend, his conductor proved to him that the lives of the knights were not wantonly sported with, and that there always were several of their number concealed in a recess of the rock to lend their assistance in case of real danger.

Still the King felt humbled and abashed in his own mind. The sword which was suspended from his side felt like a weight of lead, while the heroic generosity of Adelgunda suffused his cheeks with a burning blush of admiration mixed with shame, nor did his presence of mind return till the commander, addressing the leader of the third division, related the manner in which the King had conducted himself towards the supposed messengers from the Landgrave of Hesse. Here his conscience told him he had merited praise, and with a firm step he advanced to receive the waving plumes which were placed in his casque. When he had replaced the helmet on his head, he felt relieved, and with pleasure followed the steps of his conductor, who, leading him beyond the walls of the fortress, showed him the blazing pile, and after visiting the hermitage and reading the tablets once more, re-entered the hall, where the leader of the fourth order waited his approach. To him the commander recounted the generous manner in which the king had resisted the temptations held out by the Landgrave, and afterwards applied for the assistance of this order, to marshal himself on the side of his most powerful and declared enemy for the purpose of protecting injured innocence.

The leader listened with pleasure, and presenting the highest badge of the order—the massive collar—addressed him in these words: 'Take this, my noble liege, and when it shall glisten on your breast, your brethren must follow wherever

you may choose to require their swords, for you have proved yourself most worthy to command.'

The commander addressed him: 'Sire, I have yet to say that, although the message from the Landgrave was feigned, yet is the story true with this difference only, that the fortune of war smiles on the arms of the spoiler, while the forces of the Archbishop daily diminish. You may therefore yet accomplish your generous wish. To-morrow you may appear as accuser against the Landgrave, and then as avenger lead on your troops.'

As the old man concluded these words the sound of the great bell summoned the whole knights, who entered the hall with loud and repeated acclamations, which echoed along the vaulted ceiling, to congratulate their future sovereign on so gloriously acquiring every badge of dignity.

When the leaders of the four orders had spread their banners on the table, the commander informed the King that he ought now to have sworn eternal obedience to the behests of the Lion, but, as he was destined ere long to rule over them, such an oath was impossible. Then falling on his right knee, while all the knights followed his example, he thus continued, while the young King, in spite of his reluctance, was obliged to ascend the throne:

'All hail to the ruler of Sicily! all hail to the future Emperor of Germany! To him the noble order of the Lion now swears fealty and obedience. Continue as you have already begun, and ever imitate the character of that monarch of the forest; like him move on, unconscious of fear, and respected by all; but, like him also, turn aside in pity from a prostrate foe. May your happy country be indebted to you for the blessings of peace, and under your auspicious reign may the desolated wastes once more resound with the voice of gladness and everyone sit contented beneath the shade of his own fig-tree. For happiness dwells not near the blood-stained path of the destroyer, she shrinks from the blast of the trumpet, and loves to wander by the cot of the husbandman when nature, assisted by art, puts on her loveliest robes. Hasten then, my honoured liege, to restore these happy times which live but in the poet's

song, and then shall you with justice be hailed as the father of your country. Our order have sworn allegiance and are ready to follow wherever you may lead, but with perfect confidence I trust that you will never conduct them but where virtue calls, and where the lustre of this well-earned glory may not be tarnished.'

The King deeply affected said with great emphasis: 'No, never!' and descending from the throne, and falling on his knees, 'Here by the Eternal God I swear never! Father, brothers, I thank you. You have made me the happiest of men, and never shall the remembrance of this solemn hour be effaced from my memory, and from this moment every member of this glorious order shall be indeed a brother, to whom my heart shall be ever open.'

The commander declared: 'God hears your vow, and it is already registered in heaven. I trust I have this day secured the happiness of this order, the child of my affection, and I can now with pleasure descend into that grave which has long yawned to receive these aged bones.'

The priest now entered the hall, and after a solemn prayer affixed to the King's casque a crest of the hair of a lion's mane. When the ceremony was concluded the commander again addressed the King saying:

'By the statutes of our order you ought now to have been anointed with the holy chrysma, but to you, who have been already anointed king, that is unnecessary. Neither can I require that you should swear to devote the next four years of your life exclusively to the service of the order. Higher and more important duties call on you. It was I who framed the statutes of the order, and I therefore trust my friends will not repine at my departing from one of them on this occasion, and instead of the former statute, let it be enacted that, when a crowned head shall honour the order by becoming one of its members, the whole knights shall be bound for four years to fight under his banners. Say, my noble sons, have I your consent? Let all those who accede to my proposal express their approbation by striking their swords on their shields.' He had scarce concluded

when the hall once more resounded with the unanimous clash of arms, while all shouted out that they were ready to follow wherever their new brother might choose to lead, and would willingly spill the last drop of their blood in his service.

The King, perfectly overcome by the scene, was long unable to speak, but at length, smothering his emotions, he returned his thanks in a style of manly eloquence mixed with all the energetic warmth of a feeling heart, and then, retiring to his apartment, indulged himself in the various reflections elicited by the events of the morning.

He beheld with real satisfaction the different badges with which his armour was ornamented, the sword alone he feared to contemplate, and dreaded to touch; nor could he satisfy his own mind to whose generosity he owed it that the weakness he had betrayed in his conversation with Adelgunda had been thus concealed. At times he conceived he must be indebted to female delicacy, which could alone be capable of such forbearance, and again the numerous marks of parental affection he had received from old Farnsburg induced him to believe that the same kindness had made him anxious to spare him the public mortification, while he purposely touched his conscience by so just a picture of the vice which had so nearly conquered him. He, however, resolved to treasure up the remembrance of the disgraceful scene, and never again to seek for gratification beyond the paths of rectitude.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A SUMMONS to attend the banqueting hall interrupted Frederick's meditations, and, better satisfied with himself since he had formed so sage a resolution, he obeyed the summons with alacrity, and found the ladies, who were not permitted to take their seats in the hall, waiting in the corridor to congratulate him on his brilliant success.

Adelgunda was of the number, and, as she stepped forward to offer her hand, the flush of burning shame passed across the King's countenance. He looked down, and, touching his sword, could only say, 'Thanks, eternal thanks to you!'

Adelgunda, not seeming to remark his confusion, continued to approach with her usual graceful and easy manner, saying that although Eschenbach had not been able to quit the couch of his father, whose dissolution was momentarily expected, he had insisted upon sending her to the Castle to offer her heartfelt congratulations to her generous King and benefactor. 'I thank him,' stammered the King, 'but to you must I offer the thanks of a bursting heart. No, I can never forget that.'

Adelgunda, fearing that his evident emotion might be remarked by the other women, and occasion unpleasant remarks, interrupted him with a smiling courtesy, saying that it was now time for the ladies to retire, as the commander was approaching to take his seat at the feast, and, without waiting for his answer, took hold of the arms of Bertha and Agnes and hastened along the corridor.

The King was now obliged to enter the hall, and sit down to the banquet, which was prolonged till the first rays of the rising sun peeped through the lofty casements. It was in

vain that he had several times attempted to escape from a scene in which he could not at that moment participate, as the few words he had been able to speak to Adelgunda had in no wise satisfied his doubts, and he was now more anxious than ever for a few minutes' private conversation.

At length he was released from his painful confinement, and hastened to his own apartment, though not with the intention of seeking repose. His mind was the seat of a thousand contending emotions, and a fever circulated through his burning veins. He approached the window, and, throwing open the casement, breathed the morning air. Still he in vain sought for repose, and at length, hoping that Adelgunda might also have wandered forth to think of her absent lover, he descended the staircase, and by one of the private doors reached the outer ramparts. A secret instinct made him bend his steps towards the lime grove, where he had last parted from Adelgunda. As he entered it, he perceived the object of his search seated on the ground, and in a voice scarcely audible singing the morning hymn to the Virgin, while the tear that strayed down her cheek showed that at that moment she was thinking of the groves of Sicily more than the absent Eschenbach.

Frederick, unwilling to interrupt her, paused till she had finished, and then, apologising for his intrusion, requested her in the most anxious manner to inform him if to her generosity alone he owed the greatest of obligations, or if any other had been made a partaker of the dreadful secret. Adelgunda for some time evaded his questions, but seeing his evident emotion she at length owned that she had deceived the commander by a false report, and that the gratitude she felt towards the King had alone induced her to undertake so painful a task. 'For,' she continued, 'I feared that had I refused, another and a lovelier female might have been employed whose attractions would have proved more dangerous, while at the same time she would not have felt as I did, that it was my duty and my pride to conceal any transient weakness of my beloved prince. Then, fear not, my liege, Adelgunda would rather expire than betray your secret, and here before your eyes would I tear out

this tongue, did I think I could ever be guilty of betraying the frailty of the most generous of men. Nor need you have any uneasiness as to the perfect privacy of our interview on that day, for ere I undertook the vile and despicable office I made it an absolute condition that no one should be near, and even Eschenbach himself neither knew the time nor place of our meeting.'

'Tis, then, to you, and you alone, beloved Adelgunda,' said the King, 'that I am thus indebted. Oh, deign to receive my grateful thanks! May heaven bless you for this god-like deed, and shower down every blessing on the heads of you and the happy Eschenbach! Here I swear, by every hope of future happiness, that she who was silent but to save shall never plead in vain, though she should require half of my empire; and the name of Adelgunda shall be the talisman to guide my actions. Most generous of women, on my knees let me return my thanks. Nay, shrink not from a sentiment pure as the unspotted shrine at which it is offered. 'Tis the emanation of a heart refined and purified by your virtue, that now looks up to you as a saint in heaven, and which shudders at the base thought of any grosser sentiment which might offend your heavenly purity.'

Adelgunda presented her hand to raise the King, and was about to reply, when a rustling among the leaves alarmed them both, and, turning suddenly round, they beheld Eschenbach rushing forward, while the wildest indignation glared from his red and swollen eyes. 'Serpent!' he cried, addressing Adelgunda, 'enjoy not thy triumph too soon. The plain, rude son of the North can resist all thy Sicilian fascinations, and is yet strong enough to burst asunder those chains my vanity conceived were indissoluble.' When Adelgunda attempted to interrupt him, 'Peace!' he continued, 'I will not listen to thy treacherous excuses. "Renounce the Sicilian, and fulfil an earlier and more sacred engagement," were the last words of an expiring parent. I will. Hear me, you sainted spirit, if you yet hover near me, hear me swear to obey your wishes, and, thank God, I can now do so without a pang. Infamous woman, I renounce thee for ever! Follow thy inclinations,

nor fear that I will check thy wishes!' Then, turning to the King, who remained in speechless astonishment, he continued: 'From you I ought to seek an exemplary and bloody satisfaction, but your rank protects you, nor will I become a regicide and raise my sword against the Lord's anointed. Farewell, then; and enjoy, if your conscience will permit, the fruits of your perjury.'

Thus saying, he hurried from the grove without waiting their reply; and, although the King hastened after him with the utmost expedition to explain the fatal mystery, and determined even to expose his own conduct on the former interview rather than that Adelgunda's character should suffer, he could not overtake the indignant knight, who ere he could reach the courtyard was already mounted on his foaming steed that had brought him to the Castle, and now bore him as rapidly over the drawbridge till he was concealed by the intervening trees.

Adelgunda stood immovable, while her fine eyes were raised to heaven, and the tears coursed each other down her pallid cheeks. At length she cried: 'O Corradin, thy cause is now avenged: thy fatal curse is at length accomplished!' Then, without listening to the King, who sought to speak comfort, she flew to her own apartment, to indulge in privacy the sorrow of her heart.

The King now felt it an imperious duty to save the honour of Adelgunda, however much his own feelings might suffer by the necessary explanation, and without deliberation hastened to the apartment of Farnsburg, and, holding out the sword as he entered, cried: 'Here—take back thy fatal—thy undeserved gift! A mean, selfish feeling has nearly led me to commit an irredeemable crime: this sword, which I owed solely to the most generous of women, I flattered myself I might have one day deserved by my own merits; but it is already wetted by the tears of innocence; it is dim with the sigh of a breaking heart, and the grasp of it scares me to the marrow of my bones.'

'This open avowal,' answered the commander, 'this confession of a transient weakness, and anxious wish to atone

for the past, has wiped away thy errors and again rendered thee worthy to wear this sword. Receive it, then, once more from my hands, while it shall be my care to undeceive the impetuous Eschenbach, who has apparently been irritated by appearances. Experience, though severe, is often the best lesson youth can receive. The remembrance of this will teach thee in future to keep a guard over thy passions. Hasten, then, to fix thy wavering affections by the indissoluble tie of matrimony, nor stain the brightest days of thy glory.'

The King promised to follow the advice of his venerable friend, and then left his apartment, considerably relieved in having fulfilled the calls of honour; and, as he drew his sword to contemplate it for the first time with pleasure, a tear of gratitude fell upon the blade, and he wiped it gently off and cried, 'Thus perishes the last remembrances of the too lovely Adelgunda!'

As soon as the King had retired, old Farnsburg quitted his couch, and, after dispatching a messenger to recall Eschenbach, visited Adelgunda, whose tears he dried with the assurance that, ere many hours were elapsed, she should be completely vindicated in the eyes of her lover. And when his argument had succeeded in restoring tranquillity to her bosom, he sought the King, whom he desired to follow him to the old hall, where all the knights were assembled to deliberate on the projected expedition against the Landgrave of Hesse. It was determined that four hundred knights should be in readiness to attend the King at Mayence, each with four men-at-arms, furnished either from their own purse or the treasury of the order; and with this little troop was the King to enter the territories of the Archbishop of Mayence.

Meanwhile, the rest of the order—among whom were Frederick, Henry, and the others—who had so lately returned from Palestine, were to use their utmost influence to promote the King's interests at home.

Farnsburg, then rising from his throne, thus addressed the assembly:

'Ere we part, my beloved friends and children, let me take leave of you all; for, although I trust the arm of the

Almighty will be stretched over us, and the Lord of Hosts attend us in this just cause, yet I dare not hope to celebrate the feast of victory with you. I feel that my mortal pilgrimage is fast drawing to a close. The return of my beloved children, it is true, added a few drops of oil to the expiring lamp, but the flame is vacillating and must soon be extinguished in smoke. But, thanks to you, my noble friends, old Farnsburg will long live in the fame of his adopted children after his body has become food for the worms, and perhaps his memory be embalmed in the tears of his grateful countrymen after his bones have been restored to their kindred dust. Thanks! thanks! thanks! eternal thanks in the name of the Lion! He will lay down his head in peace, for no bad action lies heavy on his soul.' Then, looking round him with evident emotion, while a tear trickled down his furrowed cheek, he continued: 'Farewell! a long farewell! This tear proves that it is with sorrow I quit my children, and that I could have been contented to have tarried yet a little longer with you.'

All the knights, and Lewis in particular, felt deeply affected at the old veteran's words, and crowded round him, while they cried, 'O beloved Father of the Lion, leave us not yet——'

'My dear sons,' continued Farnsburg, 'spare my feelings and conceal your love, if you would not make me feel still heavier the pangs of an eternal separation. But I have yet one care—assist me in removing it that I may die in perfect resignation. Yesterday, and it is a day that must live for ever in your remembrance, a King entered our order and took you all under his protection, but as the voice of his country must soon call him to mount the throne, he cannot, by succeeding me, become your commander. If you wish then that my latest sigh should be heaved in gratitude to you, let me have the satisfaction of beknowing on whom your choice will devolve, and who must have the honour of mounting this seat which I have had the pride of so long filling.'

'No! no! we cannot choose,' cried the knights unanimously, 'we cannot think of losing our beloved father!'

Farnsburg was now obliged to repeat his entreaties, which

he did in a manner so earnest and fervent that the knights at length felt it their duty to obey, and accordingly retired to deliberate, after having received from Farnsburg the warning that by the statutes of the order his son was excluded from all pretension to this high office, which might otherwise have become hereditary from the undue influence of a father's partiality.

Some time elapsed before the knights returned to the hall, when they communicated that their unanimous choice had fallen on Frederick, Count of Frohburg, a choice which seemed to meet the secret wishes of the commander, who embraced his successor with all the fervour of parental affection, while Frederick poured forth an earnest prayer that many years might elapse before he was called to fill that high dignity to which the esteem of his order had raised him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

After a lapse of eight days, everything being prepared, the King proceeded towards Mayence at the head of the knights chosen to attend him.

During this interval the messenger sent to recall Eschenbach had returned, but Adelgunda's sorrows were only increased when she learned that he could nowhere be found, and had never been heard of from the day he quitted the Castle of the Lion.

Her love for him had been in no wise diminished by the jealousy he had shown, which, judging by the exquisite sensibility of her own feelings, she could more than pardon.

She now wished to retire to Sicily, and would have sought the retirement of some convent, had not the entreaties of her friends and the advice of old Farnsburg at length induced her to remain for some time longer, as Eschenbach must ere long return to a spot by which he was bound alike by oaths and duty.

Another month now elapsed, during which the pleasing intelligence reached the Castle that King Frederick had received at Mayence the homage due to him as Emperor, and that numbers of adherents were daily flocking to his standard, when Eschenbach one morning early entered the apartment of Farnsburg, leading a lady concealed by a long veil.

'Thou art a thousand times welcome,' cried the delighted old man, 'although my messenger did not find you, yet I never doubted to see you return; for well I knew your honest heart, and that it would soon repent of its hasty passion, and seek to atone to your injured mistress.'

'Yes, my noble lord,' returned Eschenbach, 'I have already

repented that I did not prove ere I proceeded to act upon my suspicions. I have, however, now begged forgiveness and reconciled injured innocence with the assurance of eternal love.'

The commander asked: 'Is this then Adelgunda? and are you going to carry her from us so soon?'

Eschenbach threw back the lady's veil. 'What is the King's mistress to me? No, earlier duties bade us part, and she fortunately saved me the pain of a disclosure by proving that she was unworthy of my love, and enabled me to quit her without a pang.'

'Just heavens!' cried the commander; 'do my eyes deceive me? Is not this Maria, your unfortunate sister?'

'It is indeed Maria, but not my sister. She is my love and my betrothed bride, towards whom I will now fulfil my former vows.'

'Say not so, Eschenbach; you totter on the brink of a dreadful precipice; thy awakened love is hurrying thee blindfold to the commission of a crime beyond which lies eternal perdition; thou seekest to deceive me, but I will stand between thee and the dreadful incest. Maria, thou darest not love thy brother?'

'My noble chief,' said Eschenbach; 'learn to know your son better. But I foresaw that my first words would shock you, and that I had only reproof to look for till you had learned the wondrous story which will prove that the lovely Maria is not my sister. Ere long I shall lay before you all the proof, but to prevent the snares of malice being again spread over this lovely sufferer, I thought it my duty first to snatch her from destruction, and I now commit her to your care, nor will I ever again behold her face till you yourself shall consign her to my love.'

'Heavens! can it be possible?' cried the commander. 'You speak with that tone which carries conviction to my mind, and makes me tremble, lest in mine old age I have loaded my soul with guilt.'

'Fear not,' said Eschenbach, 'my more than father; your noble soul is stained with no crime, nor are you in anywise

answerable for the foul deed which I have yet to relate. But I must hasten to produce the witnesses who can best remove that dark veil which has so long been industriously spread before your eyes. To-morrow I hope to return, but to convince you fully it is necessary that the commander of the Black Knights should meet me here. He was yesterday at the Convent of Benedictines. Send for him and he will readily obey the summons; but should he arrive before me, let him not know the cause of the invitation, and above all things conceal Maria from his eyes, for should suspicion once awaken in his heart, wickedness might yet triumph. Inured as he is to fraud and guilt, an unexpected attack alone can force the consummate villain to that confession we require.'

The commander replied: 'Most readily will I comply with all your requests; my heart forebodes deeds of darkness, and I am only supported through the trial by the assurance that no guilt attaches itself to me.'

'Farewell, father of the righteous Lion,' said Eschenbach; 'to-morrow's sun shall witness your complete triumph over your enemies. Maria, farewell; to-morrow I hope to embrace you as my bride before all my assembled friends.'

With these words Eschenbach hurried away. Count Farnsburg sat pensive, pondering over the mysterious hints he had just heard, and Maria, fearing to interrupt his meditations, sat bathed in tears by his side, when the door was flung open, and Adelgunda in breathless agitation rushed into the apartment! Without noticing Maria, she ran up to the side of the couch, and seizing the commander's hand looked at him for some time as if to read her fate in his countenance. At length she cried: 'My streaming eyes have seen him; Eschenbach was here, but he has fled without seeing, without once inquiring for, his poor Adelgunda. He was with you. Oh, pity me then, and say, have you spoken to him? Is he convinced of my innocence?'

Farnsburg requested her to calm her agitation and return to her apartment, where he would soon join her, but at this moment he was most particularly engaged, and could not speak to her. These words drew Adelgunda's attention for the first

time towards Maria, who had risen on her entrance and shrinking from her gaze leaned weeping against a column. 'Who is this lovely female?' cried Adelgunda. 'O God! were she my sister, gladly would I press her to my agonised heart. Her sympathising countenance, her eyes swimming in tears, tell me she is also a child of sorrow. Sister in affliction, at least give me your hand; let us be friends and mingle tears together.'

Maria was approaching to receive the extended hand of Adelgunda, while her meek and resigned expression of countenance seemed to speak her so accustomed to sorrow and disappointment that she was even ready to embrace a rival, and mildly yield up her claims to her, when Farnsburg said: 'Forgive me, but you must not converse now. I hope you may yet have many other opportunities of being friends, but at present, Adelgunda, I must entreat of you once more to return to your apartment.'

After Adelgunda's departure, Maria informed the commander that she had never taken the veil as he supposed, for, although desirous of doing so, she had been constantly prevented by her confessor, who with a degree of mystery had assured her that a day might yet come when she would sincerely thank him for his interference. This much she voluntarily communicated; but, when Farnsburg would have pursued his inquiries, she requested to be excused, as she had already promised to Eschenbach not to anticipate any part of the discovery he was to make on the morrow.

The old man highly approved of her prudence, and requested her to hold the same line of conduct in her communication with her friends to whom he now led her.

They at first started at her approach, but soon recognising their long-lost Maria, flew to receive her with open arms, and, as they had never known the real cause of her sudden disappearance from the Castle, would have embarrassed her with their questions, had not Farnsburg in a stern tone commanded them to desist, at the same time desiring them in a whisper not to allow Adelgunda to suspect the connection which had formerly existed between Eschenbach and Maria,

and to prevent the secret being divulged through accident or the carelessness of any of the attendants, he requested Maria to confine herself to her own apartment and not appear in public till after the return of Eschenbach.

Still did the old man shrink from any interview with the interesting Adelgunda, and wishing at least to postpone the dreaded explanation, he sent a message to inform her that a load of business claimed the whole of his attention at this interesting crisis, and rendered it impossible for him to see her at present.

In fact his anxiety and uncertainty were equal to hers, and repose fled from his couch as he watched the return of a day which he trusted to clear up all his doubts and in some degree restore tranquillity to his bosom.

By the earliest dawn of morning Eschenbach thundered at the gates of the Castle accompanied by three knights and an old priest who were secretly conveyed to a remote part of the building, there to remain till their testimony should be necessary. Meanwhile Eschenbach was shut up with the commander and his successor Frederick, where they continued till the warder announced the approach of the leader of the Black Knights, who, according to Eschenbach's information, had been found at the Dominican Convent. Farnsburg descended to the courtyard to receive him, and welcoming him in his usual friendly manner, presented the cup of hospitality, when one of the Black Knights rushing into the apartment with breathless eagerness delivered a paper which he said had been brought by an express to the convent almost immediately after his departure. The leader read it over several times with marks of the utmost astonishment and fear, and after endeavouring to compose his features requested Farnsburg to excuse his abrupt departure, but that business of the utmost moment required his immediate presence. It was in vain that Farnsburg entreated him to remain, as affairs of at least equal consequence required his presence here. The other remained deaf to his entreaties, and he was forced to alter his tone and peremptorily to declare that he should not be permitted to quit the Castle till he had heard what they had to say.

The leader of the Black Knights then inquired: 'You surely do not intend to treat me as a prisoner, or dare to arraign me as a criminal at your self-created bar? But perhaps another ghost has been favouring you with a visit, and I, forsooth, must be forced to waste my precious time in exorcising the foul fiend. Often before this time have I repented my own folly in entering into an alliance with your order; but had I suspected this——'

Frederick finished the sentence for him. 'Thou would'st not have appeared! I believe thee, nor need'st thou back thy assertions with an oath. In the name of our order, from which no crime however secret, however wrapt in mystery, could ever be concealed, I charge thee to answer our accusations. To resist were vain, and force must soon compel thee. I charge thee therefore to follow me to the presence of the assembled knights.'

The leader of the Black Knights replied: 'Unthankful wretches! And is it thus ye dare to speak to me? I see you wish to fasten a quarrel on me. Then be it so! and may curses be the lot of him who shall first cry peace,' he said, and drew his blade. 'Come on then, braggarts, and this good sword shall drink the heart's blood of him who dares to stop my passage.' He now attempted to rush from the hall, but a number of knights who were there assembled instantly sprang between him and the gate, and in a moment disarmed him and the bearer of the letter, who had also drawn in his defence.

At this additional insult his fury seemed to increase threefold, and he now abused Frederick with every appellation that his rage could invent; but Frederick, without even seeming to hear what he said, calmly desired some of his attendants to convey the leader to the Assembly Hall where all the knights of the fourth order, together with Eschenbach and the stranger who had accompanied him to the Castle, were already convened. Count Farnsburg ascended the throne, and Frederick, who was now to officiate as judge for the first time, took his seat on his right hand. After which Eschenbach, stepping up to the lower part of the table in the character of

accuser, said: 'I complain of fraud and wickedness, of treachery of the basest kind, in the person of him who calls himself the leader of the Black Knights. Basely has he deceived us, and sought to lower us to his own base standard; by his foul arts has our glory been stained and our character done away. Villains! How shall I begin! A thirst of revenge chokes my utterance, when I reflect how cruelly they led my unhappy father astray, and have now doomed me to publish the fault of a beloved parent, and thus cast a stain on his memory. Hear me, my brothers, and shudder while you hear! False was the story which my father related in your assembly, false were all the proofs adduced in support of it, and forged were the letters which were handed for your perusal. This order (a shame and obloquy to knighthood) has in its numbers several members who perfectly understand the foul art of imitating characters, nor do they ever scruple to have recourse to this dishonourable artifice in order to promote their views. My dying father would not meet the presence of his Creator with so dreadful a load on his conscience. He discovered the whole web of iniquity to me, while he made me swear to disclose it in this assembly. During three days he suffered the most cruel doubts and agitations, divided between the duty which he considered he owed to his order (and which would seal his lips with eternal silence) and the horrid dread of responsibility hereafter. More than six priests did I conduct to his sick bed, but they could not speak comfort to his parting soul. They would neither absolve him from his oath to the order, nor the crime of which he had been guilty. At length I found this venerable servant of the Lord who now stands before you. He had long lived in solitude praying for the sins of his fellow creatures, and leading a saintly life of penitence. When he heard my father's situation, he weighed the sin and the obligation, and ventured to pronounce his dying penitent free from the latter, since, by keeping his oath to the order, he could make no atonement for a crime which without this necessary atonement could never be forgiven. Here have I brought him as a voucher, and that he may prove the Count of Eschenbach was not

guilty of perjury, and that it was in obedience to God's commands that he cancelled his oath.'

The venerable priest now stepped forward and declared that he had ordered his penitent in the name of the Most High God to abjure the sinful oath, and publicly to declare the whole transaction; and Eschenbach thus continued: 'Three noble and honourable knights were by my father's desire called in to witness his confession. Here they now stand, to brand me with the infamy due to a liar should I not speak the truth or deviate from it in the most trivial point, while I repeat my expiring father's words, and an avowal which he sealed with his death and which can never be effaced from my memory. "If I am yet to bless thee, my son," he said, "haste to atone for thy father's crime, and to avenge a deed which must otherwise drive my soul to perdition. The Countess of Neuenberg was innocent of the crimes with which my lying tongue loaded her memory; guiltless she fell under the steel of murderers! When I first knew her after thy mother's death she was already betrothed to Count Neuenberg, yet her fatal charms lighted in my breast a passion which no sense of duty could control. I sought to gain her father's friendship, and in these frequent opportunities my intimacy gave me of seeing her alone I ventured to disclose my guilty love, and urge her to break the word she had already given to Neuenberg, and regardless of her honour to become my bride. She, virtuous maid, rejected my proposal with deserved contempt; but, as I dared to repeat it, she informed her father and the Count of my audacious pursuit. They insisted on my giving up the one, or standing the trial of single combat. I chose the latter, while my heart, a prey to baneful passion, formed the guilty wish that I might lay my rival dead in the dust; but the Almighty strengthened his arm and his sharp sword pierced my breast.

'"I sank to all appearance dead, and, when I recovered my recollections, found myself in a convent of monks to which my attendants had carried me. They dressed my wounds with costly balsams, and their attentive care soon brought about a recovery which was yet imperfect, when the account

of Matilda's wedding to my hated rival came to fill my breast with all the pangs of jealousy and with many horrid schemes of revenge. At that period a party of strange knights arrived at the convent. They read my sorrow in my ghastly countenance, and sought by every means to win my confidence. I did not long deny it to them, and they promised comfort and assistance in all my schemes if I would become a member of their order, and allow myself to be guided entirely by them. My blind passion eagerly embraced the proposal. I followed them in the subterranean cavern where they celebrate their dark and unhallowed mysteries. My soul shuddered, but I pronounced after them the bloody oath which was required, and I became a member of the unknown Black Knights. The priest has only allowed me to disclose as much of these mysteries as are connected with my story. I dare not therefore relate all I saw and heard; suffice it to say that it is allowable to every new member to enter a small grotto, which is called the vault of blood, and there to claim vengeance against his enemies. A knight covered with a black mantle then appears and desires to know the names of those whose life is required as a sacrifice. I named the Count of Neuenberg, his wife, their progeny, and even included their property in the sacrifice I required. The terrible knight wrote my requests in a large black volume, and then asked should the vengeance proceed slowly or quickly. Let it be slow, but sure, I cried; prolong their tortures to the utmost, and let the cruel woman who spurned my love be your last victim. Let her first mourn the loss of her husband, her children, her property; then let her feel the dagger of the three times three united in her cold heart, and tell her, this hast thou deserved from the despised Eschenbach.

'"The avenger promised compliance with this accursed request, but in return bade me bind myself to wander to the Holy Land, and there fight against the infidels as an atonement for the projected crime. I promised it, and the book of vengeance was closed. What fell to my lot in the Holy Land I have already related with truth to thee and the knights of thy order. But neither the horrors of my long captivity, nor

the absence which divided me from Matilda, could quench the flame that consumed me, nor render me insensible to the torments of unreturned affection or the gratification I expected in finding my revenge accomplished. On my return to Germany, still burning with love and with ire, I blush to confess that I felt a secret joy in learning that Neuenberg's widow now mourned the loss of her husband, her sons, and her property, and lived retired in Frohburg's Castle. I was even vain enough to hope that she might at length be happy to throw herself into my arms, and there seek protection from the load of calamity that oppressed her. I had again determined to renew my suit, and was meditating on the means most likely to ensure my success when one of our brethren entered my apartment, and, presenting to me a dagger still reeking with the blood of the woman I had loved almost to frenzy, told me that my revenge was now accomplished. I shall not endeavour, my son, to describe my situation; every dire passion fled, and remorse, keen remorse, gnawed at my heart and preyed on my health. A violent fever seized me, but I recovered, alas! to plunge into fresh guilt.

"'Our commander immediately after my recovery appeared before me and desired the oath of implicit obedience and submission, an oath which by the rules of our order we were obliged to take without previously knowing what is required of us. He then informed me that in order to gratify my revenge, he had incurred the resentment of the valiant order of the Lion, and that it became now my duty to prevent the approaching hostilities, and to clear the honour of our knights in the eyes of those of the Lion. He then laid before me the whole horrid plan he had invented, the letters that were forged, and instructed me in all I had to say. Thou knowest but too well how implicitly I obeyed these cruel orders, yet thine and Maria's sorrow in some degree softened my heart. I felt a sort of presaging hope that I might perhaps in future be permitted to atone for the harm I had done thee and this innocent maid before my departure for Palestine. I confessed my sins to a priest, whom I entreated to watch over Maria and prevent her from hastily binding herself by any vows

of chastity. Thank God, he was faithful to his charge. Here, take the half of this golden ring, show it to the porteress of the Convent of St. Barbara, and Maria shall be delivered into thy hands. Carry her to the Castle of the Lion, and perform thy first engagement to her. I deprived her of father, mother, brothers, and property. It becomes thee to atone for thy father's guilt, and his curse will fall on thee if thou obeyest him not. Renounce the Sicilian and fulfil prior duties." So spake my dying father, and I promised to obey. My compliance seemed to restore peace to his agitated breast, and he met death with becoming composure and resignation. But, ere he breathed his last, he said he had yet some important advice to communicate, and, as if inspired by a prophetic spirit, cried: "Brave Knights of the Lion, watch over your safety, an enemy seeks to undermine it by slow degrees." Alarmed at this exclamation, I besought him to explain his meaning, and he told me that it had been determined in a full assembly of the Black Knights to employ our valour, but at the same time to weaken our forces by every possible means. This resolution was inscribed in their book of vengeance, and as far as he had been able to gather by the mysterious speeches in which they always give an account of their deeds, he feared they had already but too well succeeded in some of their plans. The protection and assistance which we granted, without consulting them, to the King of Sicily, is one of the grievances which call forth their dark revenge. Thus did my unhappy father warn me. He also confessed that the prisoners whom we found in St. Mary's Convent, and whom he had given out as his murderers, were some unhappy members of the Black Order, whose love for virtue and justice had made them very unfit for such a society. They were therefore condemned to perpetual imprisonment, having refused to obey some barbarous mandate, and a swift poison was administered to them, lest they should make any discovery when we released them. And now' (turning to the three strangers and the priest), 'ye heard, like me, my father's public confession. Neither bound to our order nor to that of the Black Knights, your testimony must be impartial and unobjectionable. Say,

then, and speak freely, have I faithfully repeated Count Eschenbach's words; have I added or omitted anything in my narration?' The strangers on their knightly oath and the priest having become testimony to the truth of all Eschenbach had advanced, he said: 'I have now ended. Knights of the righteous and valian· Lion, begin your judgment o'er the culprit.'

CHAPTER XXXVI.

To the commander of the Black Knights Frederick now said: 'Thou hast heard the charge; it lies heavy on thee, pronounced by the lips of a dying man, supported by such respectable witnesses; it must claim our full belief unless thou canst convince us of its fallacy. Defend thyself if thou canst; the righteous Lion permits it.'

The commander answered: 'My justification were easy if I stood before a knight such as my exalted dignity requires. But ye are barely my equals, and have no right to judge over me.'

'But may we not at least, as friends and allies, require an explanation?' said Frederick.

'Ah!' said the commander, 'if you speak thus you shall have it fully. The confession of the dying man is a tissue of infamous falsehood!'

Eschenbach, starting from his seat, cried: 'Infamous! Wretch, this shall cost thee dear.'

'Eschenbach, do not interrupt him. He heard thee in silence, do thou the same,' said Frederick.

The commander continued: 'I then repeat that the whole is a lie, but I greatly doubt that the honest knight who was ever a faithful member of our order could have uttered such falsehoods, and here I challenge thee, Count Eschenbach, and thy witnesses of this falsehood. I will prove it is one, and will answer thee in the open lists if thou darest contradict my assertion.'

'I accept the challenge,' said Eschenbach; 'I contradict thy dishonest boldness, and I desire to hear thy proofs.'

'Thou shalt hear,' answered the commander; 'but beware

they do not sound to thine ear like the roaring of the Almighty's avenging thunder. Just Knights of the Lion, forgive me if I accuse one among you of villany, but even the finest flock may reckon in its number a scabbed sheep, and it becomes the duty of the shepherd to cast him off, that he may not infect the rest. Ye must all remember that Eschenbach once loved Maria with the warmest affection, and ye cannot have forgotten the grief under which he nearly sank when it was discovered that she was his sister. The first love of man is seldom or ever wholly extinguished. It may sometimes sleep for years, it may seek to be gratified in the arms of another object, but a bare remembrance, a trifling circumstance, a faint gleam of hope, will revive the ancient flame. Love awakens with redoubled ardour, nor leaves any means untried to procure immediate gratification. Thus has it happened with Eschenbach. He hoped to find comfort and happiness with the fair Sicilian, but when his dying father called him to his bed of sickness, when he bade him be as a parent to his forsaken sister, and was weak enough to disclose the place of her retirement, and to confess she had not yet taken the veil, the impure flames of incestuous love awakened anew in Eschenbach's breast, and drove him to disregard everything that is holy—religion, honour, and truth—that he might gratify his passion——'

'Peace!' shouted Eschenbach, 'thou impious calumniator, or I will on the spot——' Frederick here once more checked the impetuous Eschenbach, and bade the commander proceed.

'I have nothing more to say. Eschenbach has invented a falsehood, which, if it finds belief, must ensure him the possession of his guilty love.'

Frederick said: 'Thou endest ill. To facts clearly stated, thou opposest mere conjectures far from succeeding in contradicting the evidence; thou hast at most made it suspicious.'

'I am fortunate,' answered the commander, 'that I have thus far succeeded, and can ask no more for the present till you have given me time to discover the whole web of iniquity and to destroy it.'

'But here,' said Frederick, 'are these respectable and

honourable men above all suspicion of deceit, whose testimony so strongly accuses thee. What answer canst thou make to them?'

'I should bow to their assertion, and be fain to confess myself guilty, did not my faithful memory interpose as a friend in this instance. How can men who have often been called to account by my order for their unjust dealings, and insatiable rapine, how can they who were so often forced by us to restore the wrongly acquired property, be admitted as evidence against me and mine? They have eagerly embraced this welcome opportunity of revenge, they care not for their eternal weal, they laugh at sacred oaths, and now have perjured themselves, that they may in future be screened from my revenge.'

'Foul calumniator, thou liest,' said the three knights.

'I lie not,' he continued; 'I speak truth which is ever hateful to your ears. These three worthy and honest knights, who call themselves Homegg, Wartenstein, and Gattweil, were the faithful followers of Friedau and Dornegg. They shared in all their foul deeds and plunder, but retired trembling to their Castle, when our powerful order went forth to punish and avenge, and they promised amendment when we were about to chastise them.'

'How darest thou mention so vile a falsehood?' said they.

Frederick interposed: 'Say, how canst thou prove it?'

'By thousands and thousands of witnesses,' said the commander. 'Choose you amongst the knights of my order those who seem to you the most honourable and worthy of belief, ask their evidence respecting these three knights, and if they do not confirm every word of what I have advanced, then will I confess myself guilty and submit to any degrading punishment which you may inflict.

'I shall not even seek to know the names of the knights whose testimony ye shall require. I shall debar myself of all possibility of seeing or speaking to them beforehand, and remain meanwhile closely guarded in this Castle. Ye will then learn to know how cruelly you have offended your long-tried friend.'

The three knights spoke by their leader: 'We shall firmly await those who shall dare, like you, to accuse us of such infamous crimes. We are men of unsullied honour, and shall require satisfaction.'

'I, too,' said the priest, 'have heard the confession of the dying Eschenbach, and I, too, have sworn to the truth of his son's assertions. Shall you try also to render my testimony doubtful?'

'Impious wretch!' exclaimed the commander, 'I wonder at this excess of audacious impudence, through which thou challengest me to make known thy foul deed, which till now, from a generous indulgence, I buried in silence. Hear me, then, my noble friends, and chastise him as he deserves! This miserable old sinner was once one of the superiors of St. Johanna's Convent, and a member of our order, but his ambition led him to commit murder. He poisoned his abbot that he might succeed to his dignity, but the crime having been discovered, he was discarded from the society of men. He was sent to drag on his wretched existence in a wilderness, and now he dares!—ah! this is too much! On this point, also, you may question the witnesses, but lead me from here. I can no longer remain in a spot where murderers and robbers are allowed to stand up against the just and tarnish his glory.'

'Heavens! What a monster! But into the hands of the Almighty Being who knows my innocence I leave my justification,' said the priest.

'Commander of the Order of Black Knights,' said Frederick, 'thou shalt have ample means to clear thyself from the odious imputations if thou art innocent. We accept thy proposal, we shall choose witnesses from amongst thy knights, but until they appear, the accuser and the accused must remain closely guarded in this fortress.

'But yet one word more: the knight who now stands by thee brought thee a writing, the contents of which seemed greatly to agitate thee, and I saw thy cheek tinged with a deadly hue, while thou sought'st to take a hasty leave, and we could only detain thee by main force—what was the purport of

this important letter? Was it not meant to warn thee of the discoveries that awaited thee here, and didst thou not seek to save thyself by a precipitate flight? Show me the parchment and clear thyself from suspicion.'

'I should with pleasure comply with thy wish did not this writing contain important secrets concerning our order which I dare not disclose,' said the officer of the Black Knights.

'They shall remain buried in my breast, and I swear to keep them ever sacred there,' said Frederick.

'Even this promise cannot authorise me,' said the other smiling.

At these words Eschenbach sprang forward and hastily tore the parchment from the commander's girdle, in which he had laid it; then, presenting it to Frederick, cried: 'Here, take it, and judge whether he spoke the truth.'

The commander, almost frantic with fury, broke forth in bitter invectives against Eschenbach, while he declared his rash action would create eternal enmity between them, and he warned Frederick not to read the parchment, or that blood must immediately flow. Several knights, as he uttered this warning, drew their swords; but Frederick, with a look of serious expostulation, cried: 'Why draw ye your swords? who called you forth to battle?' They immediately sheathed the blades, and he continued thus: 'I must read this writing.' He read to himself, and, after a pause, exclaimed: 'Ah! innocence hath triumphed! I hold convincing proof in my hand. Brothers, prepare for battle! prepare for vengeance! The hour is at hand, and dreadful will be the conflict.' He read aloud: '"In the name of the three times three united, we send you word in the utmost haste that old Eschenbach turned a perjured traitor on his death-bed. A silly priest absolved him from his oath, and he confessed, in the presence of his son, and of several witnesses, all that our order once required of him for the purpose of deceiving the Knights of the Lion. We leave it to your wisdom to dispel the storm which hath gathered over us. We learn from our spies that you are to be invited to the Castle of the Lion and there called to an account. Although you are covered there with the wings of

the order, and may at any time reconquer your freedom, yet do we not now look upon open war as advisable and would rather farther artifice were put in use. The knights of Homegg, of Wartenstein, and of Gattweil, with the hermit Tobias, are to appear as witnesses against you. If you cannot escape the meeting, make their testimony doubtful, accuse them of murder and plunder, call upon us to support your assertions. The spies will inform us of what you have said, and we shall have time to prepare accordingly. But if you can gain a respite, our avengers will remove these witnesses from the land of the living, and effectually close their lips for ever. At all events we send this messenger after you. Should you already be in danger, then remember the wings and they will safely bear you to the bosom of Abraham." And now,' turning to the commander, 'art thou convicted? What canst thou offer against such proof?' The commander in a tone of deep contrition replied: 'Nothing, but an open avowal. Judge me not too severely. I am, 'tis true, chief of the Black Knights, but I stand under the guidance and control of the elect; they require actions from me, the goodness of which I dare not question. The welfare, the honour and glory of our order, is the sole aim of all our actions, and whatever means lead to that are deemed allowable.'

Farnsburg said: 'Ah, cruel friend, you have wounded my heart mortally. This heart which already feels the icy hand of death has been doomed in its last throbbings to become by its own credulity a prey to the wicked.'

'I will as far as lies in my power atone for the past,' said the Black Knight. 'Call together all your knights, and in their presence will I confess all I have been guilty of against their order. I will, if you desire it, freely renounce every claim to the bond of alliance we had formed, and further bind myself that my order shall ever honour yours, and never more seek to molest it.

'Take my now well-meant advice, and embrace the proposal, instead of a vengeance which would ill suit the noble character of the Lion, since I am now wholly in your power. Reflect that a feud with us can never end, each individual

member is bound to revenge the death of his brother, and, while one of us is yet living, all your lives are in danger. Think on this, and lean to mercy, but first assemble all your knights. I wish them to witness my repentance and my confession.'

Frederick spoke: 'The righteous Lion thirsteth not after blood; repentance and a free avowal will oft reconcile him. We shall therefore suspend our judgment till we hear thine.'

Frederick, by the sound of the usual bell, now summoned together all the knights who were then assembled in the fortress. They entered and placed themselves according to their rank, awaiting in respectful silence the orders of their chief.

The commander of the Black Knights stepped forward to the middle of the hall as if preparing to begin his confession. But he looked around him on the assembled warriors with an eye betraying fiery delight, and after a pause, exclaimed: 'Heaven be praised! that I have foreseen this and acted while it was time;' then, raising his eyes and arms to heaven he called in a loud and impressive tone, "Eli, Eli, Lama Sabakthani."'

No sooner were these mysterious words uttered than the greatest number of the knights drew their swords and struck wildly on their shields and closed their ranks round the sable commander. Even from the footsteps of the throne rushed a few to guard him; four hundred shields were lifted in his defence while only fifty closely pressed round the venerable Count Farnsburg, seeking to protect him in this unequal contest. Frederick had hastily risen from his seat, exclaiming: 'What means all this, Knights of the Lion; perfidious brothers, what would you?'

Count Farnsburg said: 'O my God and my Father let me die! Close my eyes in eternal sleep that I may not behold this horrid image of treason! Let the dear delusion last until my soul hath taken its flight to Thee. Sons of the Lion, degenerate sons, remember your oaths!'

The Black Knight replied: 'They do remember them; they are true to the oath and the duty which they owe to

me! Ah! old grey head—ah! impetuous youth—have I then outwitted you?

'Your order stood in our way. It became necessary either to incorporate it with ours or destroy it. The first became impossible, our principles could never agree. The elect, therefore, chalked out another plan which we have faithfully accomplished. The best of your knights were sent to Palestine, and fell under the destructive sword of the Saracens; few alone returned to this land, and we saw how anxiously you sought to replace the lost members. We sent you some of our own order who easily gained admittance. These are the wings which shall carry me safe to the bosom of Abraham, and these form the chief number of the troops who now fight by King Frederick's side. As his interest is contrary to ours, I have commanded them to be cautious, and I trust ere long they will deliver the true Knights of the Lion into the power of the Hessians, that thus the remaining seed may be scattered and never again take root in Germany. I must, however, confess that old Eschenbach's treason discovered our plans too soon; the fruit which we had expected for our reward is not yet ripe. It had been preconcerted to let thee,' addressing Farnsburg, 'wander in peace to thy ancestors; thou,' turning to Frederick, 'wert doomed to follow him soon; and then one of us was to mount on the throne of the Lion before its destruction was accomplished. Hear me now, ye few who seek in vain to support it. Will you willingly abandon it? Will you bind yourselves to renounce your order, and never again seek to enlist another member under its standard? In return, life, liberty, and the quiet possession of your Castles shall be secured to you. Or would you rather attempt the unequal contest and meet a certain death under our swords? I have ever honoured your valour and honour it still, and therefore hope you will now yield to the circumstances of the moment, and not force us to attack you under such manifest disadvantage. Behold the few that surround this throne, chiefly weak old men—behold by whom I am surrounded, and see whether you have any chance of victory.'

Farnsburg cried: 'No! I will not stir from hence; the

beloved child which I have reared with paternal love and care will I not now forsake. I will die in its defence.'

Frederick shouted: 'Father! we stand by thee. Eternal vengeance fall upon him who seeks to shake the throne of the Lion. Perjured wretches, draw back, nor think, unequal as the contest may seem, that victory is to be cheaply acquired, for we fight in a just cause—' and he found himself supported as he said this by the band of faithful men who had not answered the signal.

The Black Knight now said: 'Listen to me while 'tis yet time. Think of your wives and children; they will curse your obstinacy while they mourn over your remains. I do not ask your liberty, your property, or your life. I only ask you to renounce an order which is already partly destroyed.'

Frederick drew his sword. 'I have never yet balanced between life and shame! I shall die happy in fulfilling my duty!'

The Black Knight appealed again: 'Before the dire battle commences, hear my warning. It is of the greatest importance to us that this deed should remain a secret. I swear therefore that ye must all die, and that I shall not stir from this spot while one amongst ye yet breathes. Consider this and save your lives.'

Frederick, snatching a shield from the knight that stood by him, covered Count Farnsburg's head with it, while he cried: 'Come, father, we will cut our way through this tribe of hellish fiends; ye shall be witness at least that we conquered or died as became your sons.'

The few faithful knights, only forty-two in number, also drew their swords, and followed closely the steps of Frederick, as he sought to make way through their enemies, whose ranks at first yielded to the impetuous onset, but the voice of their commander soon recalled their firmness, every sword was drawn, and the awful engagement began. It was but of short duration. The faithful were chiefly knights of the fourth order, who having been summoned to judgment and not to battle were clad in the homely garb of peace and had no arms but swords. The traitors had suspected what was to

happen, and were prepared accordingly; indeed, being chiefly knights of the lower degree they were obliged always to be armed. What could valour do in such a case? The noble warriors who had so valiantly defended themselves against an army of Saracens now fell under the swords of murderers.

A deep sorrow fills my heart and tears dim mine eye, while I vainly turn over the annals of this noble order and endeavour to find whether any of the favourite sons of my love escaped the dire fate. Alas! they all sank covered with wounds.

Frederick and Henry, Lewis and Eschenbach—they vainly sought to make a bulwark of their bleeding bodies around the father of the Lion. A hand for ever accursed cleaved his venerable head; he fell bathed in blood, and recommending the care of vengeance to the Almighty breathed his last. The three knights and the old priest, who had appeared as witnesses for Eschenbach, were also slaughtered. No one escaped, no one was left to relate the woeful tale. Many false reports and conjectures went abroad for a long time, ere the unerring hand of Providence unveiled the truth.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHEN the horrid scene of slaughter was accomplished, and no one but brothers of the Black Order clad in the armour of the Lion filled the hall (save the bleeding corpses of the heroes that were no more), the commander of this fiend-like Society mounted the throne of the Lion, and, leaning on his blood-stained sword, beheld with complacency the heap of dead by which he was surrounded. He then congratulated himself and his knights on their success. Then, thanking them for their faithful adherence to his interests, he, in the name of the order, promised to each the accomplishment of any wish that they might choose to name at the next meeting. The bodies of the slain were then cast into the cavern, which in former days had served as a trial of their undaunted valour, and the murderers with cautious care brought water through that passage from the adjoining torrent and washed away every trace of blood from the floor, the walls, and their own polluted hands. After having taken this necessary precaution, some of them went to order the horses to be got ready, and bidding the grooms retire (an order which was often given to them when the Knights of the Lion went on some secret expedition), these unhallowed wretches left the hall in silence, locked the door and mounting their steeds in haste left the Castle unperceived.

A deep silence now reigned throughout the deserted fortress. The grooms and serfs wondered why their masters had gone forth in such haste, and seemingly altogether without leaving one behind. The women stood amazed when they assembled in the hall at the usual hour of dinner and found no one there. They sought their lords through every apartment of the Castle,

but finding their search fruitless, for a time concluded that business of importance detained them in the hall of the Lion until so late an hour. But the death-like stillness which reigned throughout at length excited their suspicions, and, unable to gather anything from the grooms, who seemed rather inclined to avoid their questions, they sent for Count Frohburg, who was pacing to and fro in the courtyard with a pensive air, and he informed them that all the knights with Count Farnsburg at their head had left the Castle in haste and that the guard of the watch-tower had seen them take the road leading to Franconia.

The anxious wives now felt many sorrowful pangs at their hearts. Their husbands had never till this day left them without taking leave, and this hasty departure seemed to forebode new sorrow. Their uneasiness, however, was of short duration, for at the moment that they were taking their seats at the once festive and now melancholy board, the sound of trumpets made them rush to the casement, when they hailed with delight several Knights of the Lion who were just arrived. One of these, addressing Count Frohburg, brought him the greeting of his old friend Farnsburg and his sons, with the request that he would comfort the sorrowing ladies; as business of the utmost importance, but to which no sort of danger was annexed, had called them forth in haste, nor could they at that moment fix a time for their return, which perhaps might yet be delayed some months; 'but he bids you dry the tears of the ladies and exhort them to await with fortitude the safe and sure return of their husbands. Should any news arrive from King Frederick's camp, he begs you will forward it by a faithful messenger to the neighbouring Convent of Benedictines, where some Knights of the Black Order are always in waiting and will take care to convey the dispatches to him.

Count Frohburg, leading the knight to a remote corner of the hall, asked him: 'Have you a message for my private ear?'

'None,' said the knight, 'but an order freely to answer any question you may choose to ask.'

'Is the Commander of the Black Knights among your number?'

'He left the fortress with us, but we parted in the forest and he took the road to Switzerland,' said the traitor.

'How ended Eschenbach's accusation against him?'

The Knight said, 'Are you thoroughly acquainted with this strange accusation, or did you merely hear of it in a general way?'

Frohburg replied, 'I am well acquainted with every particular of it. The commander has no secrets for me; you may therefore speak openly on the subject.'

'That would I do most willingly,' said the Black Knight, 'were I fully acquainted with the business. All I know is this—that after a long conference I and every other knight were summoned to the hall, when Eschenbach and the Black Commander exchanged a fraternal embrace; after which the order for the departure was immediately given, and I am not informed where we are to be led, as my rank does not entitle me to a knowledge of the secret councils.'

'Hem!' said Frohburg. 'A strange transaction indeed. Where did you leave Count Farnsburg and the other knights?'

'I left the whole troop in the upper forest, near the hermit's cave, where the knights of the fourth order were assembled, still deliberating. We were commanded to return before evening, as then the march is to go forward. I think it would be advisable for you to go with us, as you might then commune with our officer and your sons, and thus learn everything which you may wish to know for your satisfaction and that of the women.'

Frohburg determined to follow this advice and bade the knights take place at the table. When the repast was ended he announced his intention of going with them—tears at this determination once more dimmed the eyes of the females, who could not be pacified with his solemn assurance that he should return that night, or at latest the following morning. They wished at least to be permitted to accompany him, but this he peremptorily declined. 'No,' continued he, 'experience has made me wise. I know your courage and intrepidity.

You would perhaps insist on following your husbands and expose yourselves to dangers and unnecessary hardships. Forgive me, then, if I oppose your wishes with a father's authority; consider your situation and do not again deprive me of the happiness of enclosing a grandchild in these aged arms.' Obliged to submit, they now saw him depart with bitter sorrow, but none with keener anguish than Adelgunda and Maria. They had both expected on this day a decision of their fate, and were now doomed to drag on weeks and months in such a cruel state of uncertainty. They each approached the Count, and secretly whispered their wishes that he would bring them a decision, whatever it might be. The one trembled lest he should still think her guilty, the other felt all the anxiety of a virtuous and tender heart, still uncertain whether she was to love him as a sister or as one entitled soon to bear a dearer name.

Unhappy maids! little did they suspect that the object of their fondest affection was now an inanimate corse.

'Rest in peace, and may thy bones decay in oblivion,' cried the ruthless knights, after having murdered the venerable Count Frohburg in the forest and hurled his remains down a deep abyss. The unsuspicious old man, who thought himself in the midst of friends, only felt in part the pang of death. The blow which laid him dead was given from behind, and he could not know the hand that thus deprived him of the few remaining days of his life.

This deed of darkness met with the full approbation of the Black Commander, although it had not been settled beforehand; and he thanked the cruel zeal which had delivered him from a man whose knowledge of the transaction with Eschenbach, and whose eager inquiries, made him dangerous. It was thought necessary once more to deceive the wretched widows of the fortress. Several knights in the garb of the Lion were therefore dispatched to announce that Count Frohburg had proceeded on the expedition with his friends, and the private secretary was ordered to exert his odious skill in imitating the writing of that hand so dear to poor Clara, when the following letter was dispatched to her:

'My beloved Wife,—Honour, duty, and my sacred oath called me from thee, with this addition to my sorrow, that I durst not take leave of thee, nor communicate the aim of our expedition; but so far I am permitted to say, that although it may last for some months, yet glory without danger awaits us. Be comforted, therefore, and be assured that on our return peace shall smile over our country, and we shall be allowed to enjoy its fruits with our wives.

'Henry and Lewis greet their beloved Agnes and Adelaide, and bid thee comfort them with the assurance of their certain return. Our fathers are both going with us, as their advice may be of great use, and as no risk threatens their lives. I grieve at being obliged to fill the hearts of Maria and Adelgunda with fresh sorrow. It has been once more indirectly proved that the wretched girl is Eschenbach's sister. Send her, therefore, back to her Convent and persuade the latter to return to Sicily, as Eschenbach, for the sake of his still beloved sister, intends, like her, to devote his life to celibacy within the walls of a convent, and has sworn never to marry.'

The message of the false knights and this well-forged letter completely deceived Clara and her sisters, and stilled their fears for the safety of their husbands, whom they promised to await with patience and with fortitude. Clara, having answered her Frederick's letter, was now wholly engrossed with the cruel task she had to perform in instructing the two wretched maids of their fate. Adelgunda's keen eye soon observed the expression of soft pity with which Clara often looked at her, and immediately insisted on knowing all. She heard her sentence with deep sorrow, but with firmness. 'I shall follow thy husband's counsel,' cried she; 'I shall seek to imitate the cruel Eschenbach, who awoke and cherished love in this heart, merely to destroy it. Yet will I not murmur against him—he is only the instrument of Providence, the avenger of Corradin!—and I have deserved my lot!'

The following morning found her already prepared for her departure. She took a weeping leave of her friends, and, attended by the old priest, who had followed her from

Jerusalem, began her journey towards Italy. He was a member of the Black Order, but his virtues and strict integrity had long ere this convinced the superiors that he was not a fit instrument for their purposes. He was therefore not initiated into their secret mysteries, and only knew the bright outside of the order whose aim he thought was to propagate the love of God and the zeal of His service. This powerful and dangerous order had many such members, who were often blind instruments of its secret purposes, but never knew them, and thought themselves employed in meritorious and virtuous acts; and as it was allowed for every brother of any rank in the order to admit new members of the first degree, many of them were thus received, and had already sunk under the sword of the Saracens ere the proper ceremonies for their admission could be performed in Germany, so that they knew nothing of the order for which they had bled. The old priest was one of these, and while he had bled and been a captive in Palestine, he was ignorant of even the statutes of his order. He faithfully accompanied the lovely Sicilian to the convent which she had chosen in Italy, but earnestly recommended her at parting not to risk her future happiness by rash vows.

The unhappy Maria also immediately left the Castle of the Lion, deeply wounded by the hand of sorrow, and on her return to the convent which she had so lately quitted, she dedicated herself to the Lord; but her throbbing heart long continued to ache under the vestal's garb. Too virtuous to cherish an unhallowed flame, yet she keenly felt that the hopes of her youth were for ever blasted, and that to the grave alone she could look for peace.

Her friends at the Castle of the Lion saw her depart with streaming eyes, and while their sympathising bosoms swelled with her sorrow, little did they suspect that the moment was at hand when their own wretchedness would claim all their tears. False messages and false letters, however, continued to deceive them some time longer, and to prolong an error the discovery of which would doom them to despair.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

KING FREDERICK, meanwhile, unconscious of what was passing, and that he had two hundred treacherous members of the Black Order in his train, had been received with open arms at Mayence by the Archbishop.

The Commander of the Black Knights had ordered those who served (as members of the Lion) under Frederick's banners to obey their leader, as he did not foresee that he should so soon accomplish the destruction of this rival order, and wanted to see on which side the fortune of war should declare ere he determined on his future proceedings, which were to be solely directed by mean and sordid views of interest. Directed by the Archbishop's advice, the King sent two noble Knights of the Lion, Bushmanhausen and Hofstetten, as ambassadors to the Prelate of Cologne, offering his assistance in terms that unequivocably showed the disinterestedness of the offer. It found the Archbishop flying from before a victorious enemy, oppressed on all sides, and disappointed in the application he had made to the ungrateful Otto, who, though chiefly indebted to him for the crown he now wore, had coldly refused to send him any help. At such a moment the generous proposal of a prince against whose interest he had been always striving deeply sank in the heart of the Archbishop, who accepted it with ardent gratitude, and a promise of showing that gratitude in future; and he soon had the happiness to behold the King at the head of five thousand horsemen and six thousand foot in his camp. Ere Frederick had left Mayence this immense accession had taken place in his army, from numberless knights who hastened from the circles of Franconia to pay homage to the young King, and

who flocked under his banners. The approach of this powerful body of troops had made the Hessians retire with precipitation; but Frederick, eager to cull his first laurels in Germany, pursued them with unremitting ardour. He found them advantageously encamped on an eminence; but, regardless of the evident advantage of their position, he impetuously attacked them, and after a warm engagement obtained a decisive victory. The Landgrave with difficulty escaped within a small fortress, in which the King's troops besieged him on the following day. Unable to make any defence, he at first sought to win the young monarch by the most brilliant promises to restore Matilda to her uncle.

Soon after being reconciled to his injured wife by the King's kind offices, he became his most faithful adherent, and served him truly until death.

Frederick's generous and feeling heart bled for the fair Matilda when he brought her back to her stern uncle, who, perceiving from her situation that she had sacrificed her honour, spurned her from him with horror. He was not moved to pity till he heard an account of her sufferings and the manner in which she had been betrayed; but, while he forgave, he banished her to a convent, where he bade her bury her shame.

It is most likely that at that period this lovely sufferer made a deep impression on the susceptible heart of Frederick, for he offered to conduct her to a convent; but she appeared some years afterwards at his court as his acknowledged mistress, and became afterwards the mother of the fair Enzius.

Meanwhile her uncle publicly renounced his friendship with Otto, and with fervent and grateful zeal devoted himself to the interest of Frederick.

Three powerful German princes having thus declared themselves in favour of the young monarch, and the King of Bohemia having entered into a negotiation with him, Otto thought it high time to give up the advantages he had obtained in Italy, and hasten back to support the wavering

fidelity of his German adherents. He assembled his army at Breisach, and summoned all the German princes to attend in his defence. Few, however, obeyed the call; but as it might be feared that delays would tend to strengthen his army, Frederick determined at once to march against him and stop his further progress.

Notwithstanding the powerful accession which his forces daily received, he sent messengers to the Castle of the Lion desiring further aid in this decisive moment; but great was his surprise and that of the faithful knights when they heard that not one of the warriors remained in the fortress, and that they had all gone a month since on some secret expedition. Neither the King nor Bushmanhausen could conceive the meaning of this mystery, as they had often received letters from the Commander of the Lion making no mention of this intended expedition, and it wounded their hearts to be thus kept in ignorance of what, from their rank in the order, they were entitled to know. They exhausted themselves in vain conjectures, the most probable of which were always at length considered as very doubtful.

The two rival armies now stood opposite to each other. Otto was encamped near Uberlingen, and Hofstetten, with Bushmanhausen, undertook to reconnoitre the strength of the Emperor's army, and to ascertain whether an attack might be ventured upon with hopes of success; but their looks of dismay on their return both astonished and startled the King, who eagerly inquired the cause. It was some time ere they could speak, the consciousness of the supposed perfidy of their brothers had so overcome them. They wished to have doubted the evidence of their senses when they were forced to relate that they had plainly seen from an adjoining eminence a troop of more than five hundred Knights of the Lion arrive in Otto's camp, the standard of the order waving before them, and loud shouts greeting their arrival. Otto himself came forth from his tent to meet them and embraced their leader, in whom Bushmanhausen thought he recognised Count Frederick of Frohburg by his arms.

The King, still firm in his faith towards his allies and long

tried friends, would not credit the intelligence, and declared that Bushmanhausen must have been deceived from the distance, or that this was perhaps a stratagem of the enemy to intimidate him. His anxiety, however, would have led him to seek at once to convince himself with his own eyes, but as night was fast approaching he was obliged to wait until the following morning, while Bushmanhausen and Hofstetten, who could not share his sanguine hopes, retired mournfully to their tent. They had not been long together when the Knight of Wellberg, who was, like them, of the fourth order, but whom they had left at the Castle of the Lion, entered the tent. They rose joyfully to greet him, as from him they anticipated an explanation of all their doubts—but he rejected their proffered hands with a stern countenance.

'I come not as your friend,' he cried, 'but as inquisitor of the order. The Lion has understood that you take upon yourselves to act from a self-created authority, and to lead its brave members in a feud which you were not ordered to undertake. You were commanded to humble the Landgrave of Hesse, and support the oppressed Archbishop of Cologne. Have you fulfilled the object of your mission? Why do you not return and give an account of your actions? What would you begin here? Answer me, the Lion requires it.'

Bushmanhausen replied, 'We have fulfilled the commands of the order. We were desired to protect our Royal ally, to fight by his side, and to follow wherever he should lead.'

Wellberg observed, 'You were desired to do so because the order hoped that the ambitious youth would not misuse his power. Did he not vow to restore peace to this wretched country? Did he not promise to win the hearts and votes of the princes by noble actions only, and thus gain the crown, without striking one blow. Speak, if you dare to undertake his defence; how has he kept his word? Few are the princes who have declared in his favour; no one as yet has offered him the imperial diadem, and yet the rash, inconsiderate boy leads his army against Otto, and thus raises the standard of civil war. Ambition leads him astray, but that you should follow his footsteps admits of no excuse. You stain the

honour of our order, and the avenger will call you to a severe account for it.'

Bushmanhausen replied, 'We have sworn fealty and obedience to King Frederick. We have sworn to maintain his injured rights. Has the just Lion forgotten this? Surely such contradiction cannot proceed from him? This is my first and last answer, and you may carry your further messages to the King.'

'I was not sent to the King,' said Wellberg, 'but to you. I have nothing to say to him, for he has not fulfilled the duties which our order required, and we have therefore obliterated his name from the book of the Living See,' presenting a writing. 'Do you behold the seal of the righteous Lion? I hope you will honour it. The commander desires you to assemble this night all the Knights of the Lion, and that you will communicate the contents of this writing to them—may he expect obedience?'

'He may,' said Bushmanhausen, 'for we do not wish to conceal his will from the rest of the brethren. Let everyone act according to conscience and duty.'

'Yet one word more,' said Wellberg. 'If you obey implicitly, your fault will be forgiven, but should you dare to resist, death and shame shall be your portion.'

Bushmanhausen and Hofstetten were now left in deep thought and anxious surprise. They, however, summoned all their fortitude, and having assembled all the oldest Knights of the Lion who were then in Frederick's camp, Hofstetten stepped in the middle of the circle and read as follows:

'Honourable Knights of the righteous Lion,—Your leaders have trespassed against the commands of the order, and involved you in a feud of which we highly disapprove. The reasons for our disapprobation you will hear from them, as we have already verbally informed them through our ambassador; but at the same time promise you and them entire forgiveness of the past, provided you pay implicit obedience to what we now require in the name of the order. It has ever been the noblest attribute of the Lion to fly to succour the oppressed. True to this generous impulse we have

gone forth to defend the feeble Otto against the proud, audacious Frederick. Do not ask how this happened, but be satisfied in being told that the vain youth is no more a member of our order, for he has made himself unworthy of its protection. If, then, ye are mindful of your oaths and your duties to the order, leave his army this night and join ours. We shall await you on the banks of the stream which divides the two camps, and shall receive you as true and dear brothers. But vengeance and death in their most hideous shapes shall fall on the perjured wretch, whom we may yet behold fighting under Frederick's standard by to-morrow's sun. Come, then, we shall wait for you till the approach of morning, when we shall fall on the unprepared youth and snatch victory from his expectant grasp. Ye must leave his camp in small divisions, that your desertion may not be too soon suspected. Knights of the Lion guard the outposts, flight therefore becomes easy, and your disobedience would be inexcusable. Then dread our vengeance and submit to our commands.'

A death-like silence prevailed in the circle of the knights after hearing the strange import of this writing. They were all true Knights of the Lion and looked at each other with surprise, no one daring to speak first, and each awaiting the decision of the other. At length Bushmanhausen gave words to his honest feelings, and they agreed with him that, although obedience to the order was their first duty, there was one still more imperious which bade them not deviate from the path of rectitude and honour. They spent themselves in vain and sundry conjectures why their commander should so suddenly change his language and his conduct. Some were inclined to think it a stratagem by way of discovering whether perfidy might not exist in Frederick's camp, and endeavoured to account for the appearance they had seen by supposing 'Count Frederick of Frohburg with his knights had only gone to Otto as a mediator to offer proposals and save bloodshed. The result of their consultation was firmly to adhere to the first commands they had received, and not forsake their King in the day of trial; but it was also agreed that the

contents of the writing should be communicated to the other knights, that they might all be at liberty to follow their own decision.

By degrees everyone was informed of those strange orders. Surprise seemed at first to actuate the hearers, but most of them, after having desired to see the writing, declared their determination to obey its mandates, and ere the midnight hours had been announced by the watch more than one-half of the Knights of the Lion had already left King Frederick's camp. Bushmanhausen and Hofstetten thought it their duty to communicate to him all that had passed, and he eagerly adopted the idea that this was only a stratagem by which traitors had been expelled from his tents, and he anticipated joyfully the arrival of his friends, whom he hoped to thank on the morrow for their care. He, however, did not despise Bushmanhausen's caution, who appointed new guards at the outposts, and even doubled them for fear of surprise. Before the sun had risen over the valley, these announced that Otto's army was advancing rapidly, and it was fortunate for the young King that he had listened to Bushmanhausen's counsel and already prepared his troops in battle array. One hundred Knights of the Lion still remained faithful, and repeated loudly their oath of allegiance to Frederick, who now led them on to meet his enemy.

He sighed deeply when he beheld the standard of the Lion waving amidst the glittering spears of Otto's warriors. He pointed with one hand towards that once honoured banner, and, laying the other on his heart, felt unable to speak; while Bushmanhausen, filled with honest indignation, tore the plume of feathers from his helm and broke the collar of the order, and, treading them under foot, cried, 'Perish, ye badges, once my pride, my honour! perish, now that you serve to adorn the head and cover the breast of perjury! Let those who feel as I do act like me.'

All the knights imitated the example of their leader, and Frederick, deeply moved by a sight which brought tears into his eyes, said, 'God be praised, I have yet some friends left; on their valour and on the justice of my cause will I build

my hopes, nor shall the number of my foes appal my courage, while I trust in the goodness of Providence.'

These hopes were not disappointed. The engagement began with fury on both sides, and if Otto was supported by a large number of knights who wore the badges of the Lion, the valour of that small, but chosen and faithful troop which surrounded Frederick more than overbalanced the inequality of numbers; and ere the sun had reached its meridian, the flying Otto had turned his back on the victorious squadrons of his rival. He was closely pursued, but saved himself in the town of Breisach, while a large number of prisoners fell to the power of Frederick. The faithful Bushmanhausen shuddered with anger when he beheld so many knights wearing marks of the highest dignity of the order who had disgraced them, first by perjury and then by a shameful flight. Yet, anxious to learn the truth, he did not disdain to address them, and after pointedly reproaching them with their perfidy, he asked who was their leader?

'Learn it, and repent of your audacity,' answered one of the knights. 'Our leader is Count Earnsburg, the venerable Founder and Commander of our Order. His most valiant heroes Counts Frederick and Henry of Frohburg, with Lewis and Eschenbach, accompanied him, and a tear rolled down his furrowed cheek when he learnt your disobedience to his commands; but when he saw you and your perfidious companions actually in arms against him, he called down powerful and dreadful curses on your devoted head.'

'It is impossible; thou speakest an untruth. The valiant heroes of the Lion could not at once be changed into base cowards. Where are they? whither did they fly?' said Bushmanhausen.

'If they did not sink under your ruthless sword they are now with the Emperor at Breisach; but it is more than probable they found their death in seeking to cover his flight.'

Bushmanhausen, still doubtful, but deeply distressed, reported to Frederick all he had learnt from the prisoner, and the King only sought to comfort the afflicted warrior, while he

warmly thanked him for the support he had received from him.'

Early on the following morning he visited the field of battle, and while generously employed in granting assistance to the wounded with which the earth was strewed, without seeking to distinguish friends from foes, he beheld one knight lying by the side of a river severely wounded, and whose plume of feathers still proclaimed him to have been one of those who had fought against him; and kindly addressing him, he said, 'I forgive thee freely the treason of which thou hast been guilty against thy brethren, and as such will I seek to heal thy wounds and restore thee to health. I will then grant thee and thy companions liberty unconditionally. Ye shall return to the Castle of the Lion, and should you again draw your sword against me, I even then will leave the care of vengeance to heaven!'

Hofstetten asked the wounded man: 'You were one of those who left King Frederick's camp; how were you received by his enemies?'

'Alas! with joyful acclamations and warm brotherly greetings. I was with many others led to the camp, where we spent the night in banqueting till the dawn of day, when we were ordered to mount our horses. We went forward in a detached troop; the main body of the army followed us at some distance, our leader having undertaken to cover the passage of the river. It was swollen by the rain which had fallen in the night. We, however, found a ford for the infantry; but having been commanded by our leader to examine a deep part in which our horses were swimming, I found myself suddenly pierced in the back through the opening of my corslet by a spear, and fell into the water. More than fifty of my brethren shared the same fate, and sought like me to save themselves by clinging to their horses; but we were always pushed back by the murderers, who laughed aloud at our useless exertions. Unable to struggle any longer, my senses forsook me, and when I recovered I found myself lying on the banks. I sought to creep under this bush, as the heat of the sun, having warmed my armour, made me feel the most

cruel pain from my wounds. I heard the uproar of battle, but felt too weak to stir from a spot where I now feel I must soon breathe my last.'

'Great God! Did thine own brothers murder thee?' exclaimed the King.

'My own brothers,' said the wounded man; 'and this cruel conviction is more painful than death, while I do not know how I have deserved such cruel treatment. See, this' (lifting his bleeding hand) 'wound was inflicted by our leader, Wellberg, when I seized the stirrup of my horse seeking to escape from a watery grave.'

'Wellberg? Is he not our prisoner? He shall answer for this foul deed.' (To his attendants) 'Carry this wounded knight softly to the camp, and let every care and every attention be paid to him.'

'One more question,' said Bushmanhausen. 'My liege, permit me to ask him, "Was not Count Farnsburg your leader? Did not Frederick and Henry of Frohburg with his son and Eschenbach fight by his side?"'

'No, I beheld none of these. The Knight of Wellberg alone was our leader; but as we passed before the Emperor's tent, I saw in it the Commander of the Black Knights adorned with all the honourable badges of our order. I inquired the cause of this strange metamorphosis, but the evidence of my eyes was contradicted by many, and the few who, like me, expressed their wonder were treacherously murdered.'

'Ha! now a veil falls from my eyes. It is evident some horrid treachery has been practised—let us hasten to detect it,' cried his questioner.

The wounded knight was now carried forward towards the camp, while the King and his attendants followed with a hasty step. But the movement of the litter was too much for the already nearly exhausted sufferer. The blood began once more to flow from his wounds. He held his hands over his heart and again repeated his woful tale, then, leaning back on the King's arm, which had humanely supported him, he expired. His corpse was by young Frederick's orders conveyed to the prisoner Wellberg's tent. All the Knights of the Lion

placed themselves around the inanimate remains, and the King, addressing himself to Wellberg, with a thunderlike voice cried, as he pointed to the dead knight, 'Knowest thou this warrior?'

'I do; he was one of those who, obedient to the voice of his order, left thy camp and fought against thee,' said Wellberg.

'How died he?' demanded the King.

'Probably by the hand of thy warriors.'

''Tis false!' cried Bushmanhausen, who now stepped forward, and, laying his hand on the still bleeding corpse, the evidence of his truth, began an accusation in form against Wellberg, repeating all that the wounded knight had related in the presence of both himself and the King.

Wellberg remained unmoved, and appealed to the testimony of the knights who were now the King's prisoners. But Frederick cried, 'I cannot accept their evidence, for they were accomplices in the foul deed, and are therefore not meet witnesses.'

It was in vain, however, that the King of Sicily and his followers sought to bring Wellberg to confess the crime. He still persisted in asserting that the wounded knight must have been delirious or a coward, who accounted in that way for a wound of which he might well be ashamed. The presence of the leader of the Black Knights Wellberg absolutely denied, while he continued to insist that Count Farnsburg, with the choicest of his warriors, had fought that memorable day under Otto's banner. The other prisoners, in a separate examination, declared the same upon oath, and once more the noble young King and the faithful and honest Bushmanhausen were involved in doubt and perplexity. Meanwhile news reached the camp that the vanquished Otto, with a few faithful adherents, had flown into Saxony with the intention of raising an army with all speed.

The neighbouring princes at the same moment crowded to do homage to young Frederick, who thought it advisable to push those advantages, and not leave his enemy time to gather new forces. He therefore broke up his camp, and on

his march towards Eger, where he was invited to form an alliance with the King of Bohemia, he received the homage of many cities. His brightening prospects did not, however, make him lend a deaf ear to the few true Knights of the Lion who remained by him, and who earnestly entreated that he would make a slight deviation from the straight road and visit the once beloved, and now detested, castle, where they hoped at last to find an explanation of the mysteries which had so long kept them in a state of horrid suspense. Just as the King, in the intention of complying with their wishes, was passing with his army through the forest, which we have so often had occasion to mention, he saw a small troop coming towards him. Several women were riding in the midst of their squires and grooms, and no sooner beheld the glittering spears of the warriors than they hastily fled sideways in the wilderness. It was with difficulty that the King and his knights overtook them. It was with surprise and sorrow that they recognised Clara, Agnes, Bertha and Adelaide clad in widow's weeds, deprived of that bloom which rendered their beauty once so conspicuous. Their cheeks were bathed in tears, and every feature, every gesture betrayed heartfelt anguish. Adelaide held her young son in her arms, and pressed him convulsively to her bosom, while Clara exclaimed, 'Barbarians, murderers! are you coming also to destroy us? Willingly, joyfully could I meet death at your hands, but a yet unborn being claims life from me, mercy from you. He has never offended you, the child of my Frederick can never call forth your enmity. Have pity also on that infant' (pointing to Adelaide's babe). 'See how she seeks to shelter it from your fury.'

'Just heavens!' exclaimed Bushmanhausen, ''tis, then, but too true. Your perfidious husbands, then, have fallen in the field of their dishonour!'

And Frederick could not forbear saying, 'Then am I even denied the comfort of weeping o'er their graves. My eyes have no tears for traitors.'

But Agnes fiercely cried, 'Accursed be your hypocritical tongue! accursed be your insidious speeches with which

you seek to dishonour the victims of your rage! Had they fallen in the field, had they bought with their heart's blood the good of their country, or spread the glory of God, I should weep, 'tis true, but I should not despair. Ah! when I think how dreadful was the end of those matchless heroes, my heart is torn, my brain on fire. They fell by the sword of treacherous friends; here, within these peaceable walls, the hand of brothers inflicted the death blow. Heaven! have ye no curses for them? Pour them on their heads! annihilate them from the face of the earth! . . . .'

'Hold! lady, what say ye? Murdered!' said the King in astonishment.

'And by the hand of brothers!' incredulously repeated his companion.

'Impossible! Impossible!' cried all the knights.

'Oh! cease your insidious questions,' said poor Agnes. 'Even if you were not actors in that scene of horror, it did not surely happen without your knowledge and consent; who but yourselves could have so long deceived us with false messages and forged letters? But go, take possession of the deserted castle, where death and corruption in their most hideous forms wait to greet you. Go and enjoy the fruits of your guilt.'

A considerable time elapsed ere the King and his knights could succeed in gathering the truth from the incoherent speeches of the agonised widows, and in convincing them of his perfect innocence and ignorance of the foul deed which had deprived them of their husbands and him of his friends. At length they abjured their suspicions, and looked up, still with tearful eyes, but a ray of hope gleamed through their tears, and seemed to say that the death of their lords should not remain unrevenged. Clara undertook to relate all that had occurred since the King had left the Castle of the Lion; and after expressing the surprise that the sudden departure of the knights had occasioned, and the inquietude she and her sister had felt until they received those letters which had so long deceived them, she thus continued:—

'I had just received another letter from my Frederick, con-

taining accounts of his welfare and that of his friends, when the hermit who lives close by the rock, and goes by no other name than that of Brother to the Order, was ushered into our presence. Terror and anguish were strongly printed in his pale countenance and tears rolled down his furrowed cheeks, while in trembling accents he inquired where all the knights had gone?—whether the Commander and our husbands had remained at home?—whether we had heard from them, or soon expected them home? We endeavoured to calm the evident anxiety of the good-hearted old man by imparting the news we had received and even showing our last letters. But while he read them a fresh burst of sorrow flowed from his lips, and clasping his hands he cried, "Woe be to me! ye are unprepared, and I must destroy your hopes—drive you to distraction! But I can no longer leave you in an error—your own lives are in danger." He then proceeded to relate that having, as was his monthly custom, gone to offer up his morning orisons by the side of a cross which stands at the opening of that vault which the Order has consecrated to its mysteries, a strong death-like vapour had seemed to arise from it. He descended, and the smell grew noxious. He went in search of lights, descended once more, and . . . . Oh! I have not strength to disclose what he saw. . . . Many of the faithful knights of the Lion lay dead. . . .'

Clara's tears choked her utterance. She could not complete the horrid picture. Agnes endeavoured to summon resolution, but her accents were also those of woe and horror, and her tongue faltered as she related that her Henry with his brother, Lewis, Eschenbach and Count Farnsburg, disfigured by many wounds and the horrid ravages of the grave, lay amidst heaps of dead warriors in that vault, and met the horrorstruck gaze of the hermit.

'We insisted,' continued she, 'on visiting the spot, and being assured of our misfortune. We descended into the vault followed by men bearing torches. I sought among the dead. I soon recognised my Henry. His dress distinguished him from the rest; not so the manly beauty on which my eyes had oft so fondly hung—that was no more. The worms

already preyed on his beloved features, on his faithful heart; a scene so shocking soon deprived us of our senses. We were carried out, and it was not till the following day that the pious exhortations of the hermit recalled us to life, and to a sense of the duty we owed to their memory. But those who have loved like us, and like us have been loved in return with an affection so fond, so true, can alone form an idea of our sufferings. A week had nearly elapsed ere we could leave the bed of sickness. Meanwhile the hermit by his anxious inquiries and researches had convinced himself that a conspiracy had taken place amongst the knights, and must have ended in shocking murder. His conjecture was strengthened at finding bloodstains in the private hall where they always held their councils. The frequent forged letters we had received, and the particular injunctions that we should send all letters that should arrive from Mayence to the Benedictine Convent, made him also conclude that the Black Knights were concerned in the horrid plot, and that in consequence we were not safe, and we were urged to leave the castle and conceal ourselves for awhile. He promised to remain and inform us of whatever should further occur; and we left our, till now, dear abode this morning, with the intention of removing to Issenthal, and endeavouring to discover the fate of Count Frohburg, for whom Adelaide with good reason trembles.'

Frederick related in his turn the events of his campaign, and the suspicion he had entertained against his friends, while he and his knights perfectly agreed with the hermit's opinion. Anxious to investigate the dark mystery, he ordered a halt for his troops, and led on to the castle. No knight appeared, no voice now asked, 'Is this the step of the Lion?'

With downcast looks and knit brows the warriors sat in that hall which in days past had resounded with voices of mirth and festivity, nor could they drink the cup of welcome which the weeping widows presented with their trembling hands. It was late at night when they all retired, but not to rest. The King was standing at the casement, looking with tearful eyes on objects hardly discernible through the gloom of

night, when a rustling at the door of his apartment attracted his attention. Adelaide, the wife of Lewis, stood before him. She carried her sleeping infant in her arms, and laid him at the King's feet.

'Sorrow,' cried she, 'has made deep ravages on my frame; I do not know how soon I may follow my murdered husband. Be thou a father to this, his orphan. Take him under thy protection. Alas! his wretched mother can be of no further use to him.'

The King, deeply affected, took the child in his arms, while he pronounced in a solemn voice, 'I will be his avenger first, and then thine and his comforter.' As he uttered these words, he felt as if a cold hand had pressed his own manfully. He staggered towards his couch, and laid the child upon it. Adelaide fixed her eyes earnestly upon him, and said, 'What didst thou see?'

The King gasped out, 'My heated imagination deceived me. I thought——'

Adelaide said solemnly, 'What thou thoughtest, happened really. My Lewis stood between thee and me. He held my hand and thine. He looked on his child and seemed to thank thee for the protection which thou hast promised.'

After many years the King was heard still to mention this apparition, and Adelaide believed it firmly until her death.

On the following morning the King assembled all the knights in the Hall of the Lion. He ascended the deserted throne. Bushmanhausen and Hofstetten stood on each side of him, and followed his example when, after having surveyed the blood-stained walls, he sank on his knees, overpowered by the feelings of the moment. After an awful silence of several minutes, he thus began:

'The offended Lion demands vengeance! Vengeance! claim the desolate widows. Vengeance! cries the blood of our murdered friends. We must, then, pay the tribute of vengeance, or else dishonour will for ever brand our glory.'

'Amen! Amen! Amen! Amen!' cried all the knights.

At that moment the prisoners were brought into the hall.

The blood was shown to them, but they would not confess. The grooms asserted before Wellberg that he himself had ordered the horses to be got ready on the fatal day, and had ordered them to retire that they might not witness the departure of the knights. This Wellberg did not deny, but yet he would not confess the foul deed with which he was charged. The King, incensed at so much obstinacy, ordered the culprits to be carried into the cave where their victims still lay mouldering. Lighted torches threw a gleam over the scene of terror and death. The knights stood around with drawn swords, while Wellberg and his companions turned pale and shuddered.

The King pointed to the dead bodies: 'Who were these?'

Wellberg, faltering, answered, 'They were once our friends, our brothers.'

'Who murdered them?' said the King sternly.

Wellberg in a broken voice replied 'We, we; lead us from hence. We will confess everything.'

When they returned to the hall Wellberg disclosed the whole web of iniquity which had been practised by the Commander of the Black Knights, confessed the truth of what the wounded knights had asserted, and informed the King that it had been the intention of the Black chief to offer his services to him in case Otto should not be successful. 'Great was our crime,' added Wellberg, 'but remember, O gracious prince! that we were bound by oath to obey those who took upon themselves the whole responsibility; that, accustomed to blind and implicit obedience, we . . .'

'Peace,' commanded the King, 'I will hear no excuse. Where are thy superiors, where is thy chief?'

'They hold a council this night in the secret cave of the Order,' replied Wellberg, 'on the means of effecting our escape. This was whispered to me by a trooper in disguise as we were led here, but the news now comes too late. I would rather, by a sincere confession, save many of my innocent brethren, who were only blind instruments of obedience.'

The King asked, 'Where lies the cave of the Order?'

'You ask much,' said Wellberg, pointing to the other prisoners; 'none of these may know it. I shall break my oath a thousandfold if I disclose it before them.'

The King said to the attendants, 'Lead them all from hence. See that they are strictly guarded, and not allowed to speak with anyone. Now I ask again,' he inquired of Wellberg, 'where lies the cave of the Order?'

'In the centre of the forest which extends to the left of the Benedictine convent, but so concealed that without a guide you cannot find it. I, however, will be your guide, provided you promise to have compassion on those who, deceived by us, thought they were performing a deed most holy and praiseworthy when they paid blind obedience to the command of their superiors. More than thirty of these are now in your power. They are all knights of the First degree, who are ignorant of the chief aim and views of the Order, and whose swords did not shed the blood of their brethren.'

'This shall I prove anon,' said the King, 'and if found guiltless they may live. How many knights shall we find in the grotto?'

'Nine Elect besides the Commander,' was the reply.

'Have they any guards?' asked the King.

'Yes, ninety knights of the Third degree stand at the entrance of the cavern to receive the commands of the Order and distribute them around to the other members.'

The King said to Bushmanhausen, 'Go, in the name of the Lord. Disperse the guards of this iniquitous assembly, and bring the Commander and the nine Elect before our tribunal. See thou that none escape. Take with thee the knights of our Order, chosen from among my troops of Mayence and Hesse. Three hundred more knights, that your numbers may appal the villains and that they may surrender without a struggle, for you are not to fight, but merely to take prisoners;' and, turning to Wellberg, 'Lead them then, and the lives of thy innocent brethren shall answer for it if thou should'st seek to deceive them.'

'Fear not, my liege, my repentance is true, nor will I neglect to offer the only atonement that lies in my power.

My conscience bade me become a traitor to the Order, my conscience now bids me complete the deed.'

The moment the King was left alone he employed himself in the pious duty of ordering the funeral obsequies of the murdered heroes. Their remains (which were easily distinguishable from the bodies of the traitors who had also fallen on that fatal day, as they were not, like these, cased in armour) were carefully gathered and deposited in the family vault, while the priests who accompanied the King's army performed over them the service of the dead. No sooner were these holy offices ended than young Frederick led the widows to the Chapel, and kneeling with them on the cold marble which now covered those relics spared to love and friendship, he spent some time in prayer not unaccompanied by tears. Then, again assuming his firmness, he sought by every means in his power to pour the balm of comfort into the bosoms of the women. Towards midnight the watch on the tower announced the return of the knights, who were carrying the prisoners with them, and had accomplished their mission without difficulty. They shouted victory and vengeance, but woeful sounded the contrast of their acclamations with the doleful shrieks that proceeded from the nearest convent which was now a prey to flames.

Wellberg had informed them that the archives of the Black Order and their treasures were deposited within the walls of that monastery, where many of the secret assemblies were also held, and this information had kindled the wrath of the warriors, who determined to level its lofty spires to the ground, and had thrown their burning torches into the building. The King hastened to meet the prisoners in the courtyard. He eyed them with rage and contempt; then addressing Wellberg he said, 'I will be true to my word. Go thou and separate the innocent from the guilty.' Wellberg was led to the one side and soon returned with seventy others whom he loudly accused as the murderers of their brethren. 'Stand from them,' cried the King; 'thy repentance and thy confession absolve thee from the horrid vengeance which I will take on these. During a perpetual confinement thou mayest have

time to atone for thy crimes, and make thy peace with thy injured Maker. But first shalt thou witness how I can punish, and what thy guilt has deserved.'

The Commander of the Black Knights now endeavoured to speak, but the King would not hear him, and, ordering the yet remaining Sons of the Lion to take the prisoners in custody, he led the way to the great hall, where they all followed.

'Here,' cried the King, in slow and solemn accents, 'here began the work of your iniquity; here shall our vengeance begin.'

Several squires now entered, who were carrying the shields and arms of the prisoners, and who at the King's desire shattered them to pieces. 'Thus is your armoury rendered for ever infamous, ye murderers!' continued the King; 'now follow me to the last scene of your guilt.'

Appalled and trembling, the conscious wretches descended to the vault, when the King once more addressed them. 'In this cave did you cruelly cast the dead and the wounded, and left the maimed to perish miserably without assistance, without comfort. Thus shall you also end. Employ the short space of time which may yet be left you to repent of those crimes which make you unworthy ever again to tread on the land of the living. See,' pointing to the dead bodies around, 'ere the moon fills its orb shall you be like these. God have mercy on you, justice forbids that we should.'

On uttering this dreadful sentence the King left the vault, accompanied by his knights. Impenetrable darkness now reigned in that abode of horror. Nothing was heard save the lamentations of some, the horrid shrieks and curses of others. But soon were even these sounds cut off from the human ear, for the opening of the vault was built up with incredible haste, as also the doors which led from the hall, and the small dungeon above which led to the cavern. The necessary precautions were not neglected, at the same time, to secure the castle from attack, and one thousand men were placed on the ramparts to guard its safety, while a sufficient number remained to guard the newly built up entry of the cavern.

But though prudence might approve of these preparations,

they were in no wise necessary. Terror and anguish had spread amongst the members and confederates of the Black Order when the fate of their leader and nine superiors was known, and each expected to become a victim of the King's further vengeance.

The most considerable amongst the knights, therefore, fled to Italy, and afterwards embarked for the Holy Land, where they mixed amongst the Ensiferi and other orders. The convents and houses which stood in alliance with the Black Knights obliterated the oak leaves from their portals, and very soon no trace of this dangerous Order was more to be seen in Germany, nor do the subsequent historians make any further mention of it.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

On the day which followed the execution of the just but dreadful sentence the King sent Wellberg and his other brothers who were yet his prisoners to a fortress, where they remained closely immured during the rest of their lives. He then assembled the few true Sons of the Lion in the great hall, where he mounted the throne; but left it hastily as they knelt before him with an intention of entreating him to become Commander-in-Chief of the Order. 'No,' said the King, 'I came not here to claim a dignity which should no longer exist. I rather came to propose the dissolution of a community now already half destroyed. Still do many hundred knights of the Black Order exist over the face of the earth. They wear the marks of our dignities, they know the secrets of our Order, and can only avail themselves of both to bring shame and dishonour on the Lion. Since you choose me for your chief, the use I now make of my power is to absolve you of all oaths and duties. Be it now your care to inform the few members who may yet remain of this our resolution, that they may not run the risk of being deceived by the voice of the false Lion. But that I may be able for ever to distinguish the true knights from the traitors, that I may have it in my power to show them my eternal thanks, my eternal gratitude, I shall require of you, Knight of Hofstetten, to give me an exact list of them according to their rank, and it shall then be my care to give you all a signet by which you and your posterity may be distinguished to the latest ages.'

The knights, while they thanked the King, agreed in the

propriety of the measure, and laid by the sword and casque which they had till now worn. The image of the Lion which they bore on their arms was also erased, and they chose to themselves new devices.

The ancestors of the present Bohemian Count Czernin of Cudenach reckon in their number one Knight of the Lion, Herman Czernin, Count of Cudenach, who stands depicted in the church of Chudeniz, which he founded, bearing new arms, while it is particularly mentioned in his will that he had exchanged those of the Lion for a particular cause. He also entails in the family a ring, composed of an emerald between two golden serpents, which it seems was the mark granted by King Frederick to all true knights.

When the young monarch had thus for ever dissolved an Order once the pride and boast of Germany, he gave his utmost attention to the future interests of the widows of his once beloved friends. Adelaide having determined to retire to the valley of Issen with the other women, he appointed a proper guardian of the castle and its appurtenances, which were now become the property of her son, whom he determined always to regard as his own child. Having heard from the women of Adelgunda's return to Sicily, he sent several of his knights in search of the lovely sufferer, to persuade her not to bury her charms in a convent, to disclose to her the fatal end of Eschenbach, and to reinstate her in all her birthrights. She listened to her King's commands, and once more returned to society, when she became the wife of a Sicilian nobleman, who proved but too truly Corradin's avenger. She lived with him in an unhappy and unfruitful marriage, and at last was obliged to part from him. Some years after she appeared at Court in widow's weeds, and to claim a last favour in the name of her *who was silent*. It was no less than a father's life, whom the King had just condemned, as his restless spirit had led him to further rebellions. But he remembered his promise, and the obligation he once owed to the fair Adelgunda, and he changed the sentence into perpetual imprisonment.

Of the lovely and interesting ladies who have so often

claimed our attention and our tender compassion, only two survived for years the loss of their husbands. Clara and Bertha died soon after their arrival in the valley of Issen, but Agnes and Adelaide resisted the sharp and gnawing tooth of sorrow. They lived in retirement, and devoted themselves solely to the education of their children. Agnes had a son, who inherited the property of Frohburg and continued that honourable race. Maria had become abbess of the convent which she had chosen, and died devoted to her holy religion.

Ere the King left the Castle of the Lion he caused a stone to be placed at the entrance of the vault with these words: 'Here were buried while yet in life the murderers of the Lion. The avenger was King Frederick. Besides these were 140 faithful knights of the once powerful and honourable Order of the Lion who suffered for their faith.'

This stone still existed on the same spot in the year 1500, which induced a learned chaplain, Nicolaus Hagemuti, to gather together the relics of this Order and lay them in the archives of his family. The mountain on which the famous castle once proudly stood is still thickly covered with oak and beechwood, but no path leads up its rugged sides, and the existence of this noble edifice is only perceivable by a few scattered ruins on which the image of the Lion may still be distinguished.

King Frederick continued to gain new adherents and several victories over his rival, but was unanimously acknowledged as Emperor of the Germans only after the death of Otto. Before this period he returned to Italy, and married Constantia, daughter of the King of Aragon. On the day of his marriage, which was celebrated with great pomp, he called together all the knights of the Lion who had followed him to Sicily, and distributed to each a precious ring, which should serve as a mark by which they and their children should ever be known to him, and as a pledge that he never should refuse any request of theirs.

The historians say he kept his word and munificently rewarded all these his former friends when he had mounted the

throne of Germany. Hofstetten and Bushmanhausen particularly distinguished themselves in his service, and are mentioned as fighting by his side at the siege of Damietta in Egypt, where they both fell in his defence.

Thus closes this tale of adventure, love, and sorrow.

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